

Sirens

The Women of Television & Movies!

OF CINEMA

Final Nail in **Buffy's** Coffin?

Sirens Reviews

Sarah Michelle Gellar's
movie career

YOU HAVE SPOKEN!
MOST OVERRATED
AND
MOST UNDERRATED
ACTRESSES!

THE SHOCKING RESULTS ARE IN!

ASIA ARGENTO

SCARLET DIVA'S XXX INTERVIEW

HONG KONG'S SWEETEST THING

Our exclusive

CHERRIE YING

interview

AMBER BENSON

BUFFY's Tara takes charge

HAPPY HALLOWEEN
ELVIRA

unveils her latest flick

TUBE SIRENS:
THE WOMEN OF TV's
FALL PREMIERES

ELLEN DUBIN
MORE FOR LEXX



#4
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**GO TO BACK COVER FOR INFORMATION ON BACK ISSUES, SUBSCRIPTIONS
and the latest SIRENS OF CINEMA CONTEST!**



Welcome to the latest issue of Sirens of Cinema. I have little space left in this jam-packed issue so let me go straight to my check off list:

1) If you are looking for the proposed interview with Christina Ricci, you can stop looking. Due to overlapping schedules, we are unable to secure an interview at this time. We will present this timely, exciting and informative interview as soon as Miss Ricci's current film project is complete. Stay tuned for future developments.

2) We were overwhelmed by the number of entries received in our first Sirens of Cinema contest! We decided to keep the fun going so check out the back cover for rules on our latest contest and be sure to go to page 10 to see whom you elected as the most overrated/underrated actress! You'll be surprised at the results!

3) New and improved? You may notice a little more color in this issue of Sirens of Cinema... in fact every page is in color! If that wasn't enough we even added 8 more pages without an increase in price! We just have too much information to bring to the table and didn't want to deprive our readers by forcing cuts or severe edits. We hope you enjoy the improvements and additional information.

4) Last, but not least, I want to thank everyone for writing in. We have received tons of letters and have enjoyed reading them all. You comments, ideas, criticisms and those thankful pats on the back are much appreciated and exceedingly helpful in molding issues to come. Keep those letters coming!

This issue will round up the first year for Sirens of Cinema. Those of you that have followed along since issue #1 are sure to see the continual improvements to the publication. This first year was great and the second will be even better. Thanks to everyone for buying to magazine and special thanks to the subscribers for their continued support. We look forward to supplying you the best magazine available on the women of television and movies for years to come!

Hugh

Hugh Gallagher
Publisher

Fastlane ©2002 Fox



Sarah Michelle Gellar from Buffy The Vampire Slayer ©2002 UPN.

Sirens OF CINEMA

#4 - Fall 2002

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Sirens

SOUND-OFF!

Soundoff:

Thank you again Mr. Editor for another excellent issue of *Sirens of Cinema*. You have exceeded my wildest imagination. Okay, you didn't cover much from Venezuela but by my quick count alone you have news or articles about actresses from the US, England, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Korea, Germany, France, Australia (but a real kook, there), India, Singapore and Hawaii (but that's the US, it just seems like a world away from New Hyde Park!).

That crossword puzzle had me scratching my head because the numbers were off on some of the across lines. I tried to do it on the LIRR ride home tonight and I was thinking that I was going crazy trying to figure out the numbers. The guy sitting across from me was laughing at the pained expression on my face and he even wound up helping me figure out that it wasn't me, it was you! But he liked reading *Sirens*, too, anyway. I fell asleep and was happy to find out that he didn't abscond with my copy when he left! But I'm pretty sure he's looking to buy one of his own because he couldn't tear himself away from your Kirsten Dunst collection.

Another great job even if Virginia Hey is a freak.

Danny Zimmerman
New Hyde Park, NY

[There were 4 boxes on the crossword puzzle that should have been blackened out that weren't. The puzzle is still doable, it just messes with your mind a little... just trying to make it more challenging. Don't worry, the crossword in this issue is a little more user friendly. - Hugh Gallagher]

Dear Mr. Gallagher

You've done another fine issue of your magazine. This one is even better and more jam-packed than the second and that one was so much better than the first. By the time you do your fourth issue this will be the best magazine in the world. *Sirens of Cinema* reminds me of why I am so proud to be a female living in these times. We have so many opportunities and we live in a great country that allows us to be whatever we want to become.

It's so great to read about Yancy Butler becoming such a great actress. Almost all the other children of famous people tend to take the easy way in life but she has worked hard in her acting career and she's going to be a big star some day soon. But it is sad to read that she is having problems right now. I wish I could tell her that all of us girls in America are proud of her and we wish her the best of luck to overcome her problems.

It's even more amazing that a girl like Shu Qi could overcome what must have been terrible public condemnation in a place like China after her early career. I have to be honest to say that I never heard of her before but the writer really brought her story home to my heart. Shu Qi must be a very brave and strong girl. I tried to

find some of her movies at the local store here and I was surprised that they actually have things like BEIJING ROCKS and WESLEY'S FILE. Now I have two actresses from Asia that I like with Shu Qi and Anita Mui.

Vanessa Fan's concert story made me feel like I was there with her. You could tell her enthusiasm from her writing. She sounded like she was gushing with joy and excitement. I wish that I could go to a show like this.

The information on Kirsten Dunst was so informative and complete. You must have a great research team or you must have a lot of fun watching all these movies. I see that Hugh Gallagher and Kevin Collins are writing in all facets of the magazine about all different kinds of films. You all must be having dream jobs to be able to see all these films and to understand them all in some foreign languages too. I did not know that Kirsten had made so many films and that she had started so long ago. I watched her on *Saturday Night Live* and your review pegged it all just right because she was so beautiful and funny in all those different roles especially as the topless tennis player.

What's up with Virginia Hey? I tried to read your interview a couple of times but it was so confusing. I don't know what she is talking about sometimes and the person asking the questions did not ask her to explain some of the mysteries that she was trying to say. She was the ugly blue person on *Farscape*, wasn't she? None of us fans really liked Pa'u Zotoh Zhaan and we were glad to see her go. If Miss Hey talked like this on the set we'll bet the cast and crew were happy she left too.

Stella Stevens has always been one of my favorite television stars when I watch old movies on AMC and TMC. I wish you had shown some new photos of her because your writer said that she still looks fabulous. Is the writer Debbie Rochon the same person as the actor Debbie Rochon that you mention in the news sections? I've seen her on cable television once or twice. Once was in a real sexy film called BROADCAST BABES or something like that. If she's the same person then I didn't know that she was a writer too. That's great.

Are you going to feature more stories about classic sirens of the movies? We can read all about a lot of today's actresses in many magazines and see them on *ET* or *First Edition* on television. But I'm sure a lot of *Sirens of Cinema* readers would also like to read more about the women who made it all possible for today's sirens. Like actresses like Greta Garbo or Marlene Dietrich who we all know by name but we never really know their stories. Or people in the fifties who were in the great Hitchcock movies like Grace Kelly or Barbara Stanwyck. You'd have a really rounded off content if you did that.

Can you print issues more often? Is *Sirens* always going to be a quarterly or can we look forward to maybe once or month

or even once every two months? Right now I love just about everything but maybe you could improve your cover since it's a little cluttered and too busy and I almost missed it on the rack. I'm glad I found it though. Sincerely yours,
Sally Christie
(E-mail)

[We're always trying to make Sirens of Cinema as universal and as expansive as possible. As far as who we cover, we don't want to be constrained by the boundaries of geography or politics nor do we wish to be stuck in any period of time - we try to cover the women and the news that's happening now, we want to look forward to the actresses who will be stars in the future and, of course, we are always respectful of the women whose careers and contributions made today's stars possible. In fact, despite our name, we're not even going to restrict ourselves to coverage of women of cinema - we're playing loose and fancy free with that title and we'll look at all forms of entertainment. But no matter whom we cover, there are always going to be readers who take exception. We can't agree with everyone's point of view and everyone can't always agree with ours. But we're happy to be publishing in a land where we all have our right to express our opinions. And, yes, our Debbie Rochon is the one and only. - Kevin Collins]

Dear Sirens Soundoff,

I love your magazine. Totally radaholic in every which way. Shu Qi!!! You actually know Shu Qi! What a great article. I never expected to see that in an American magazine. She rocks like Beijing rocks! More Chinese movie stars please!

My friends and I just could not wait for the new season of *Witchblade* to start. Yancy Butler is just so hot. What a great surprise to find *Sirens of Cinema* just in time for the season to begin. I made sure not to read your synopsis of the season opening show so not to ruin it but I read it after and it helped clear up some loose ends for me.

Keep on rolling, *Sirens of Cinema*.

Kate Harrington
Fremont, CA

[Unfortunately Witchblade got the axe! News came down that TNT cancelled the show, there will not be a third season. It is still unknown why it was canceled, or if Yancy Butler's problem with alcohol had any factor in the decision. - HG]

Sirens :

May I commend you on a well-crafted and finely honed magazine that has filled a void in the communication world? *Sirens* would appear to be the first magazine that sells itself on the trade of female celebrity without catering to the basest instincts of your readers. *Sirens* has succeeded in holding its head high, quite unlike the pretenders at *Femme Fatales* or the high brow celebrity rags such as *Us* or *ET*.

Your impeccable nose for detail brings Kirsten Dunst's career into stunning perspective. I seriously doubt that most filmgoers were aware of the amount of hard work that she has put into her ever-growing talent. I am sure that many will believe her career has started with SPIDER-MAN. You have gone a long way toward setting the record straight for her. Kirsten has earned ever-growing review she has ever received and I, for one, am glad that she is finally receiving the attention she deserves.

What exactly is a Fantasy Gig? I had no idea until I delved into Miss Fan's fine review of Anita Mui's concert in Hong Kong.

That a stage show of this magnitude will travel the world over and only *Sirens of Cinema* is bringing the news to the American public is criminal. Once more, you have served the public well by picking up the ball when all the other media have dropped it. As I write this I notice that her American leg of the tour is almost finished. Will you continue to cover Fantasy Gig? When the tour is over will you consider doing a career checklist for Anita Mui? That would really blow the minds of your readers. I look forward the interview that you promise for the next issue.

If ever I had a guilty pleasure it would have to be my love for trashy television science fiction and action. *Sheena*, *Xena*, *Cleopatra 2525*, I loved them all. My two current favorites are *Witchblade* and *Lexx* (naturally) Can I only hope that your upcoming interview with Ellen will be as intensive as your complete life story of Yancy? Hope springs eternal.

Dennis Bartok
Hollywood, CA

[You can begin your experience with Ellen Dubin on page 42, Dennis. You appear to be going through a rough stretch with your list of guilty pleasures...they're dropping like flies. You'd better not miss any episodes of Lexx. You can catch up with Anita's Fantasy Gig here in Sirens as well as on our website where we have in-depth reviews of some of the shows. We agree that Kirsten Dunst is an ever-growing talent - she'll likely warrant another career-overview in about 5 years at this pace. Us and ET are high brow? Where does that leave Sirens of Cinema? - KC]

Salutations to *Sirens of Cinema*:

Please excuse our writing because our language is French.

We went to the Anita Mui concert last week in Toronto. It was very exciting and interesting for us because we speak no Chinese and so very little English. But we did purchase our tickets after reading the articles in the second *Sirens of Cinema* and we are happy to read the reviews in the third issue that the concert is also so fantastic in Hong Kong. We have tried to get the people in Montreal to add more Anita Mui movies to the annual Fantasia festivals every year.

In our area here we do not receive the transmissions of *Witchblade* but you make it sound very exciting. Yancy Butler would appear to be a very strong and willful young lady and we wish we could extent to her the *bon souhais* from our hearts for her to get better and healthier soon.

Toutes les meilleurs,
Andre Link
Montreal, Quebec

[Consider your voice added to the chorus of well-wishers for Yancy. We're glad that we steered you in the right direction on the Mui concert. As our contest results revealed, there's an underground Mui-movement going on and we're happy to do our part. - SoC]

Hi Sirens,

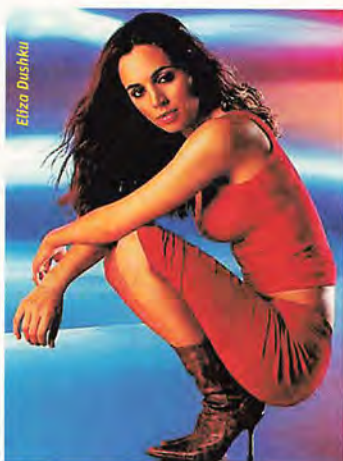
With 3 issues now complete I guess it's a safe time to begin to pass judgment on the state of *Sirens of Cinema*. You have certainly grown a lot in the span of less than a year and the magazine has become much more readable and informative with each passing issue. I especially like that the span of what is covered has broadened to include not only names and faces from different countries but even from different eras (D. Rochon's interview with S. Stevens). The growth of Asian influence

(Continued on page 9)

Sirens OF CINEMA NEWS

SIRENS OF CINEMA NEWS - Signposts up ahead... Insider reports from Casey Yip and John Marks.

We finally survived the mind-numbing "idol" days of this past American summer and we can now look ahead with hopeful dreams of an exciting autumn and winter of sirens on the big screen. Let's see what's on the chilly horizon and get in our last ticks at what passed for entertainment during the recent dog days.



Let's start off with some good news...everybody's favorite vampire killer gone bad has come back from the dead. **Eliza Dushku**, who embodied the character of Faith on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* from 1998 to 2000 has confirmed that she'll be returning to the role and to at least 5 episodes of the series towards the end of the new season. Plus, Eliza, as Faith, will also reprise the role on sister series *Angel* as well in at least 3 episodes.

Dushku's busy feature film schedule - as well as her character's apparent demise - had kept her apart from supernatural franchise, but her fans have been missing her and now, after her appearance in *CITY BY THE SEA*, she's got some free time (and maybe a vampire slayer?) to kill.

If **Jack Lemmon** and **Juliet Mills** could find fun and romance in sunny Italy in 1972's *AVANTI*, why can't **Diane Lane** recapture that loving feeling of *amore* thirty years later? *UNDER THE TUSCAN SUN* has begun production and is on tap for a 2003 release with the faithfully fantastic Lane in the starring role as a thirty-something woman who gives up her suc-



cessful law career and relocates to Italy to find romance. Based on the best-selling novel by **Frances Mayes**, the romantic comedy has been adapted and will be directed by **Audrey Wells** (of *GUINEVERE* fame).

Apparently it has gone beyond the rumor stages and now it's being considered as a *fait d'accompli* that this will be the final season for the stellar sitcom *Friends*. But that just means that we'll be seeing all of our favorite friends in some unfamiliar places. **Lisa Kudrow** - who has slyly managed to carve out a nice niche as a terrific character actress in a few films during *Friends* long run - will once again take on a lead role in *MARCI X*, as a spoiled Jewish American Princess (as if there was any other kind in the movies) who has to take over control of a rap record label after her mogul father has a heart attack during the meltdown following the release of the hardcore hip-hop single "Shoot Ya Teacha" by his top "artist." As usual, comedy ensues and the cockles of you



heart will be warmed by the messages behind love and race relations. Kudrow's unlikely paramour turns out to be **Damon Wayans** as ...get this now ... Dr. Snatchcatcher. Like a pair of comfy slippers on a cold winter's night, reliable **Richard Benjamin** directs.

Beyonce Knowles, that foxy heap o'trouble that kept *Austin Powers*' pistol packed in *GOLDMEMBER*, continues our short thread of hip-hop inspired items as she appears alongside **Steve Harvey** in Paramount Pictures projected 2003 release of *THE FIGHTING TEMPTATIONS*. Harvey is a hip-hop producer out of L.A. who heads back home to Alabama to collect on an inheritance after his wealthy aunt passes away. The corny catch is that the will stipulates that he must take over and lead the local gospel choir in order to get the money. With Harvey on one side of her and fellow co-star **Cuba Gooding Jr.** on the other, expect Beyonce to be the only star left shining when all is said and done.

KILL BILL is the latest offering by whippersnapper **Quentin Tarantino**. The reason **Uma Thurman** - as Black



Mamba - wants to do the titular deed is because Bill had the tacky audacity to gun her down at her wedding five years ago. Okay, maybe she should have seen it coming since she is a professional assassin herself, but Bill added insult to the near fatal injury because he just happened to be her groom. After the bridal party is wiped out and she's nearly bought the farm, Black Mamba wakes up after a five year coma and wants revenge. She couldn't just let it go, could she? But can you blame her? She's going to have write out all those Thank You cards by herself. **David Carradine** will be the Bill to kill and besides **Michael Madsen**, the rest of the cast will be populated by sexy sirens of cinema such as **Lucy Liu**, **Vivica A. Fox** and **Darryl Hannah**.

With plans to premiere the flick at

next year's Cannes festival, don't expect to see the festivities on your local theater screen until the Fall of 2003.



Her boots were made for gawking and that's just what we'll do. A little less bada bing and a dash more boom boom is what's on **Patricia Arquette**'s cinematic plate for the foreseeable future. Arquette will play a go-go dancer enduring a dark inner search for respect and self-esteem in this gritty drama about the traumatizing effects of rape. It's a difficult call to predict how director **Barbara Kopple** will go with this when you look over the multi-talented but artistically diverse cast that features crusty crooner **Tom Waits** and veteran ex-SNL funnyman **Jon Lovitz** going up against thesp vets **James Caan** and **Ellen Barkin**. *IN THE BOOM BOOM ROOM* is being prepared for a 2003 release through Lions Gate Films.

SHANGHAI KNIGHTS is set in 1888 Victorian England and it picks up on the ongoing escapades between buddies **Jackie Chan** and **Owen Wilson** from the hit comedy *SHANGHAI NOON*. The duo travels from the American west to jolly old England to solve the murder of Jackie's character's father and to recover the Imperial Seal. You can expect plenty of action and broad comedy in the Touchstone Pictures release (through Buena Vista) that has been pushed back from December 13th until February of 2003. Returning to the scene to add some fine female forms to the proceedings will be **Lucy Liu** as Pei Pei and **Brandon Merrill** as Falling Leaves...thus ensuring plenty of siren action in this testosterone cinema environment.

True to form, this epic about Chinese and American friends traveling to England began filming in Barandov, Czech Republic. Spectacular stunts are sure to abound in scenes that take place inside Big Ben and Madame Tussaud's Wax Museum.

As if he hasn't been in enough comic book adventures over the past few years, **Brandon Fraser** will be back in yet another mix of live action and animation in **LOONEY TUNES: BACK IN ACTION**. Amongst the expected co-stars such as Bugs, Elmer and Daffy, you can look forward to some really well-drawn lines in the persons of **Jenna Elfman** and **Heather Locklear**.

Joe Dante, who's had some luck in the kids'-eye-view-of-things genre, will be at the helm for this Warner Bros. roller coaster ride that should be hitting your theater screens in time for next year's holiday season.



It had to happen. You didn't think the producers of *American Idol* were going to let the excitement just fade away, did you? Not when there is millions of dollars of profits still on the table ready for the taking. Besides the upcoming tour and DVD and the book and the television appearances and the ongoing constant drivel coming from the insipid hosts and dotty **Paula Abdul** and transparent runner-up Sideshow Bob...er...**Justin Guarini**, word on the street has it that a movie is in the works. Yes, a movie. Apparently a docu-style retrospective on the series is in the works to show us how **Kelly Clarkson** went from her original audition to becoming the American idol. You can't wait, can you?

While the excitement of an audience participation talent show that would span an entire summer was understandable - "In theory" as Homer Simpson would put it - the fact of the matter is that the only real talent on view as *American Idol* wormed through the final 10 contestants was coming from the women's side. (Okay, we'll grant you that judge **Simon Cowell**'s keen eyes and his tongue full of honest, and sometimes diplomatic assessment were the real reasons to watch.)

The boy toys were all glitter dripped ripoffs of each other and it all came

down to the cutest choice to win...and we all know what happens to cute teenage idols, don't we? Yep, they age. Beyond the point of ripening.

But for the women, we actually had a nice mix of different styles and strong but varied talents. Ultimate winner **Clarkson** was definitely the best in show when it came to singing talent. No question there. We're happy to agree with America's voting decision.

Soul sister **Tamya Gray** clearly had the second best set of pipes on the docket and we're expecting great things from her on the music front in the near future. Cowell's wit proved not to be the only thing that was sharp when his company optioned Tamya to a contract soon after her shocking exit from the show.

Rocker **Nikki McKibbin** and pop-diva **Ryan Starr** had their moments but were probably too pigeon-holed by their definitive styles to be able to mount any cross-the-board support from the nationwide bank of voters. We give our own *Sirens of Cinema* consolation prizes to Nikki for her sexy winks and Ryan for her tantalizing torso. Note to Nikki and Ryan, you were the only girls who rocked.

We were most disappointed though when the true siren of the bunch, **Christina Christian**, was eliminated on August 7th. It seemed too early to see the Brooklyn, New York native go...especially after her heart-warming version of "The Glory of Love." Far and away the blazing beauty of the bunch, Christian appeared to be the most soft-spoken and well-reasoned contestant. We were heartened to hear her hint to *Today's Ann Curry* a few days after getting the boot that she was hoping to enter the acting arena. While most of the other Idols will be chasing their musical dreams for the remainder of their expired 15 minutes, Christian seems to have the chops and the look for a successful transition to the silver screen. Not that she needs any words of advice from *Sirens of Cinema*, but we'll pitch in our 2-cents and suggest that any project she gets involved with shouldn't include the Dunk or the other lunk or patronizing Paula.



Or...say, if Buffy is going to be laying down her stakes at the end of this coming season, who wouldn't tune into UPN to see Christina pick them up and carry on straight through the heart as the next slayer? Just a thought.



Now that we think about it, wouldn't **Christina Christian** - or either **Ryan Starr** or **Nikki McKibbin** - make a great *Barbarella* if a remake of the campy classic was ever to be mounted. Oh...right...there is one...though details right now have the project situated somewhere between reality and a pipedream.

Drew Barrymore will star in a revamp of Jane Fonda's seminal 1968 *BARBARELLA* film about the adventures of the futuristic sex kitten. Making sure things go right, Drew will also be producing the Warner Bros. and 20th Century Fox joint project and has signed on John August to pen the script (he did the honors - of a sort - for *CHARLIE'S ANGELS*).

In theory (again, with apologies to Mr. Simpson), the remake intends to stay closer to the original comic book version created in 1962 by **Jean-Claude Forest**.

Though we're never ones to push for unnecessary exploitation of actresses, we are nonetheless disappointed by the rumors suggesting that Barrymore is going to gut the heart and soul out of the *Barbarella* character by toning down her promiscuity in order to achieve a PG-13 rating. Has marketing and turning a profit finally taken the enthusiastic edge off of Barrymore's sense of fun?

If that's the case, then we'll prefer to wait on the Eurhythmics planned stage musical version of *Barbarella* which is supposed to debut in 2004.

Of course, with *CHARLIE'S ANGELS* already devastated in her résumé of

recent remakes, perhaps **Drew Barrymore** can't be stopped...one really wild rumor - and we hope it stays so - has her teaming up with courtly quirky **Courtney Love** in a big screen remake of *Laverne and Shirley*. This is the kind of development that should make Penny Marshall and Cindy Williams wish they were dead just so they could turn over in their graves. Why doesn't Hollywood ever look to remake the shows that stunk the first time instead of ruining our memories of the programs that got it right for their times? Come on, give us the great definitive version of *My Mother the Car*. Don't tarnish poor *Laverne and Shirley* the way we've already muddled the *Angels* and *Car 54 Where Are You?*

Tyra Banks has any number of marketable features but who knew that her voice would be the next one for her to cash in on? Tyra has put her throat on the line in the not necessarily for kids only animated feature **ADAM SANDLER'S EIGHT CRAZY NIGHTS**. The cartoon is all about a 33-year-old party animal (guess who), who finds himself in trouble with the law. But a kind-hearted judge gives him one last chance: he's got to spend the high holiday performing community service as the assistant referee for the youth basketball league or go to jail.

As with any Sandler outing, *EIGHT CRAZY NIGHTS* projects to be either a huge success or a dismal disappointment - there's rarely any middle ground. Tyra is in good comic company - if in voice only - with **Jon Lovitz**, **Kevin Nealon** and **Rob Schneider**. Can we at least hope that Lovitz reprises his classic Hannukah Harry creation in this November release through Columbia Tristar?



They said it, we didn't... a few words about town either from or about our

favorite Sirens of Cinema...

Promising Britney *dontwannabe* Avril Lavigne banged belly-baring Britney Spears with her words to *Elle Girl*, "I won't wear skanky clothes that show my booty, my belly or my boobs. I could be Britney. I could be better than Britney." Yes, but Britney will always be Britney. And for that, we give thanks. ... "It's certainly a strange business when one day you are kissing Elizabeth Hurley and the next you are making sweet love with a bull." Matthew Perry describing his work in *SERVING SARA*. ... "I wouldn't call it a screaming fight if only one person is yelling," parsed *FRIDA* director Julie



Matthew Perry & Elizabeth Hurley Taymor reflecting in New York on the

clash of creative differences with Miramax's man in charge Harvey Weinstein. Latest word, thankfully, is that Julie and Harvey have thankfully patched things up. ... One of the sleek operatives for Rush and Molloy popped up in front of Sirens' issue 3 heartthrob Kirsten Dunst last month and asked her for her favorite dance moves. "I like *The Sprinkler* and *The Shopping Cart*. I pretend I'm putting Downy and Jiffy in my cart!" ... SIMONE's stimulating simulant subject Rachel Roberts, "I'm all natural. 100% au naturel." Aye, we can only dream ... True to its name, London's *Daily Mirror* allowed Lara Flynn Boyle to reflect, "Some celebrities say they

can't go anywhere, even to the grocery store, but who the hell wants to go to the grocery store anyway? Lara looks likes she's skipped a few visits to the grocer's but she makes a good point nonetheless. ... Our favorite quote to kick off the Fall Season and to lock the door shut on summer comes from *Late Night's* Conan O'Brien, "According to the trade papers, *American Idol* judge Simon Cowell is about to sign up for a second season because the producers offered him \$1 million. Not only that, judge Paula Abdul is about to sign up for a second season because producers said she could live in her dressing room."

香港新聞 HONG KONG NEWS

by Kevin Collins with Vanessa Fan and Peter Lau.

The late summer news from the world of Hong Kong cinema is a mixed bag this time out. With Hollywood imports flushing homegrown product out of the Hong Kong theaters, the fate of HK cinema remains in serious doubt. For now, news about Asian cinema is coming in from all corners of the Eastern world...

★ ★ ★

Discounts galore but piracy continues to score...

Hong Kong movie theater owners have slashed ticket prices for the second time this year after another disappointing summer. With box office totals off about 36%, the Hong Kong Theatres Association announced that 51 of Hong Kong's 60 cinemas have cut their admission prices to HK \$25 (approximately US \$3.20) every Tuesday and Wednesday for an eight weeks span. Tickets usually cost between HK \$50 to HK \$70, about \$6 to \$9 in US currency. Curiously, American-owned AMC is the only major exhibitor that did not participate in the price-cutting plan.

Movie piracy, declining local film production and record levels of unemployment have been the major culprits behind the sagging box office receipts. Keep that in mind the next time you are tempted to buy one of those bootlegged VCDs in your local Chinatown, it could lead to snuffing out the next great Hong Kong flick. If the current production trend continues, Hong Kong will be lucky to reach a total of 70 original productions in 2002, down dramatically from 133 in 2001.

The only two certifiable hits during this long hot Hong Kong summer have been China Star Entertainment's *MY LEFT EYE SEE GHOSTS* and *MIGHTY*

BABY (both of which feature Cherrie Ying, see article on page 21). China Star is thinking about mounting a rights issue to raise funding for production.

A typical summer in Hong Kong used to feature a score of flicks with stars ranging from Andy Lau to Maggie Cheung and so on. Summer 2002 will feature the Hong Kong premiere of *VAN WILDER*. Think about that! At least they haven't suffered through *PLUTO NASH*...yet.

★ ★ ★



She's 18 and we like it....

Charlene Choi co-stars with pretty boy heartthrob Ekin Cheng in director James Yuen's upcoming *MY WIFE IS EIGHTEEN*. The romantic comedy

is set in England and takes comic aim at the age difference between newlyweds Cheng and Choi. Charlene, you may already be aware, is the Canadian born half of the Hong Kong singing duo *The Twins*. Is 15 years really a gap in this day and age? We're not sure of how much legitimate mirth can be mined from any real life "gap" with Ekin about to turn a (gasp) grizzled ancient 35 and Charlene, who's about to clock in at 20. But if Charlene is really playing only 18 then maybe there's a scandal there somewhere... Personally, the staff of Sirens is more upset that Ekin's playing a codger at 35.

★ ★ ★

From Bras to Babies...Hong Kong blockbuster series proves profitable.

As August barely brings Hong Kong from a boil down to a simmer, *MIGHTY BABY* remains number 1 at the box offices. Having topped HK \$18 million dollars in a little over three weeks in circulation, the comical sequel to *LA BRASSIERE* is topping American imports such as *SIGNS*, *XXX* and *STUART LITTLE 2*. While *MIGHTY BABY* isn't quite living up to the critical raves of its predecessor, the dollars are rolling in thanks to the chemistry of its star power. You can't go wrong with Gigi Leung, Carina Lau and Cecilia Cheung as your leading ladies. Hot new kid on the block Cherrie Ying also turns heads with her performance. If leading men Lau Ching and Louis Koo know what's good for them, they quickly sign up for another sequel with this bodacious cast.

A sidenote to the recent success of *MIGHTY BABY* is the curious lack of Hong Kong fare almost entirely from the most recent Top Ten weekly money earners. Besides *MIGHTY BABY*, the only other non-import title on the list is *THREE* which is earning profits at less than half the rate of the star-driven comedy.

★ ★ ★

So far, so good for SO CLOSE

Despite the heavy buildup in the

press and online, *SO CLOSE* is faring only so-so so far in Hong Kong after its early September release. It hasn't reached its expected blockbuster status as yet and the critical reviews have floundered between middling to slightly above average. Everyone admits that the film has style to spare but the story is getting far less positive word of mouth.



The film premiered in Singapore on August 27th and a lively press conference featured the three leading ladies putting their best smiles forward. Sexy Shu Qi (see *Sirens of Cinema* #3) politely sidestepped a reporter's question that seemed to allege that she was one of the corners in a love triangle that also featured singer Leon Lai and everybody's favorite Crouching Tigress Zhang Ziyi. Another topic of interest that will certainly help to heat up the film's water-cooler factor



Zhang Ziyi



centered around the onscreen kiss shared by co-stars **Vicky Zhao** and **Karen Mok**. Vicky probably sensed that this little scene may start to overshadow the film as a whole. She tried to put an end to that line of questioning when a reporter asked point blank if they would ever consider a girl-girl kiss again. Vicky deflected with, "Didn't we already do that enough?" But perky peppercorn Mok only stoked the flames by flashing her famous smile and cooing, "If it's with a cutie like Zhao-Wei, why not?"

Putting the special effects, the wire-work, kung fu and marksmanship aside, when asked what was the most diffi-

cult aspect of working on the action flick, all three actresses were in agreement – wearing high heels!

SO CLOSE opened officially in Singapore on September 12th, a week earlier in Hong Kong.

TRANSPORTER transported in time.

Meanwhile, back on the American front, Shu Qi's first big American theatrical release, **THE TRANSPORTER** with **Jason Statham** and **Francois Berleand**, has been pushed back. You might have already seen the TV commercials announcing the September 13th opening but now 20th Century Fox

either smells a dead fish or a hit that needs some additional dramatic buildup. With Shu in the stew, we are betting on hit and we'll hold on to our ducats for the extra few weeks until the new October 11th play date.

Does everybody hang out at the water-grouser?

Hopefully the DVD will make it to US shores in time for Halloween. Early September saw the Hong Kong premiere of the spooker **HAUNTED OFFICE** which features a cast that should have gotten along very well. **Karen Mok** and **Shu Qi**, who are also about to light the world on fire as two-thirds of the starring cast of **SO CLOSE**, are the female stars opposite the sturdy **Jordan Chan**, who cruised with Shu in **SKYLINE CRUISERS** (2000). Three tales of the supernatural are linked together by the workplace theme in this creepy collection that promises some genuine frights. The presence of Hong Kong horror veteran **Helena Law** practically guarantees the shudders.

When is a ripoff not a ripoff?

First we had handsome cad **Mel Gibson** feathering his bed and his professional career by tapping into women's unspoken thoughts in **WHAT A WOMAN WANTS**. Now you can try the Hong Kong version, **IF U CARE** opened in September with handsome



Gillian Chung

cad **Eason Chan** discovering the unique ability to feel the emotions of people he touches after surviving a freak accident. Naturally, he'll use the power for his own selfish reasons until a pivotal moment in life will cause him to see the light. Until then, you know he'll be looking to put the touch on lovelies like **Gillian Chung** and **Candy Lo**.

Bert Parks – Eastern Style

It's become a tradition as welcome in Hong Kong as the American version is in Atlantic City. This past August saw the new Miss Hong Kong crowned at the Hung Hom Coliseum.



Everybody Changchun tonight. Everybody have fun tonight.

The Changchun Film Festival closed on August 26th. Changchun is the capital city of the Jilin province in north-eastern China and is where a great portion of the mainland's film production takes place. The Festival welcomed over 120 films into competition from all over the world including 29 from Hong Kong and even 7 from Taiwan. Entries were also submitted from the United States, Japan, France and several other countries. **Anita Mui** took home the festival's Golden Deer Best Actress Award for her stirring emotional portrayal of a wife in crisis in **JULY RHAPSODY**.

Though Anita was unable to be in Changchun to receive the award – as all Sirens readers know, she's on her world tour – she sent her thanks and acknowledged that she was surprised to be chosen because the criteria for the Golden Deer is based on art rather than on entertainment value. Anita also expressed an interest in working

with mainland directors in the future.

After 20 glorious years in show business, the awards still continue to pile up on Mui's mantle. In late July she received the Hong Kong-Taiwan Region Extraordinary Dedication Music Award in Beijing.

Meanwhile, since we last left you in **Sirens of Cinema #3**, Mui's Fantasy Gig has been banking those frequent flyer miles with stops in Malaysia, Atlantic City and Oakland in the U.S., Toronto, Sydney and Singapore. You can find some concert reviews at www.sirensforcinema.com

As if winning all of those awards wasn't enough, when Anita's tour pulled into Oakland, official greetings were sent by California governor **Gray Davis** and the mayor of Oakland proclaimed June 23, 2002 officially to be **Anita Mui Day** in recognition of her enthusiastic efforts with charity functions. Anita was presented with the official proclamation which also included commendations for some of her best film roles.





As if Hong Kong's traditions hadn't been trampled on enough by imports from Western culture, the winner was 21-year old **Tiffany Lam**, fresh out of San Francisco, California, USA. The runner-up was 20-year old **Victoria Jolly** from England. Hong Kong's own **Cathy Wu Ka-Wai** came in 3rd.

"I didn't think I had a chance of winning," Lam quipped, "I'm still on *Cloud Nine*." Adding to her overall title, Lam also took home the prizes for "Miss International Congeniality" and "Miss Beauty for a New Age." Onlookers and judges seemed to be in total agreement on all accounts.

"Miss Photogenic" went to **Cerina Da Graca** who, not coincidentally, also won the titles of "Miss Total Beauty" and "Most Natural Skin." (How do they verify that last one?)

Past winners of "Miss Photogenic" included **Maggie Cheung** (1983) and **Anita Yuen** (1990) who have both parlayed their photogenic pluses into successful movie careers.



She's back on top!

We reported in our last issue of the seemingly endless plight of **Vicky Zhao**. Now we're happy to inform that Vicky's definitely back on the upswing. She's riding the crest of **SO CLOSE** (see above) and she was just named 2002 Sexiest Asian Female Celebrity by *FHM* magazine!

Vicky has certainly been in better spirits lately. She recording a special greeting to her fans on the second anniversary of the ZhaoWeiNetFamily.com website. A nice touch and an example of why this

genuinely gifted and caring actress will almost certainly overcome the hardships that rained down on her over the past year.

Here's hoping that her stock keeps rising.



Michelle still has the right Touch...

Michelle Yeoh's new kung fu epic **THE TOUCH** has been released in both Hong Kong and on the mainland. Though the film has been met some stifling reviews by the Chinese critics who cite it for a lack of originality and creativity and the overuse of special effects, it has nonetheless met with the approval of China's movie-going patrons. In various area of the mainland, the film has surpassed box-office totals for past imported hits such as **STAR WARS: ATTACK OF THE CLONES** and **THE LORD OF THE RINGS**. The **Peter Pau** directed hit was made in conjunction with Hong Kong-based Mythical Films and Tianjin Film Studio and is an action-adventure, set in contemporary China, about the search for a mythical Buddhist artifact.

With a budget infusion of \$20 million – nearly 10 times that of the average Hong Kong or Chinese flick – **THE TOUCH** is destined to be a blockbuster if only out of necessity. With hopes of matching the success of **CROUCHING TIGER HIDDEN DRAGON**, you can expect to see **THE TOUCH** kick its way into your local cineplex sometime in the summer of 2003. Let *Sirens of Cinema* preview it for you with our own review in issue #5.

Turnabout is fair play

Anita Mui is not only a champion of stage and screen, she's taken on the role of Chairman of the Hong Kong Artists Association. With some recent hot confrontations between artists and the media in Hong Kong – such as Cecilia Cheung's garbage can being rifled for scandal sheet fodder – there had been rumors that the artists were

going to self-impose a gag order on themselves to quiet the press. Mui, however, made it clear that no such action would take place. But in protest of some guileless media practices Mui stated, "We've got to face the facts, artists are also human beings and they do have privacy and human rights." Anita also guaranteed that the Association will not stand by and allow any more invasions of privacy or scandalous lies to be told. If action has to be taken, it will.

As if to add an exclamation point to her statement, Mui showed up a few days later at a ribbon cutting ceremony in Happy Valley and toted her own tape recorder to preserve her conversation with the media, thus giving the presshounds fair warning that her words better not be misconstrued when they reach the news stands. Always bringing her courage and vitality to the forefront, Mui recognizes that, as Chairman, she will be a moving target for the press but she's been down that route before.

Did they keep the can in the can?

Word out of Kuala Lumpur has it that a flash of nudity in the controversial government financed film **EMBUN** is causing an uproar. **Mohamed Shariff Ahmad** of the National Film Corpora-

tion of Malaysia said that he saw **Izi Yahya's** buttocks during a scene in which the actor portrayed a Japanese lieutenant raping actress **Umie Aida**. Just to get it straight, according to the *Straits Times*, Ahmad said, "I saw Izi Yahya's bottom in the unedited scenes of **EMBUN** directed by **Erma Fatima** before the film was sent to the National Censorship Board." It is still uncertain if the bare buns will pass the board of censors.

For her part, **Umie Aida** reported that she did not see Izi's nude bottom because she was lying on her back during the filming of that particular scene. Obeying strict customs, **Umie** also confirmed that her body and **Yahya's** never came in contact and that the illusion of her being pinned down during the rape was effected by camera angles.

The speculation surrounding **EMBUN** has caused such hoopla that the National Film Corporation in Malaysia has placed a gag order on the cast and crew of the next film **PALUH** to avoid a repeat of the mess after **Yahya** had come out in the press and exposed the presence of the nude scene.

As we go to press, the official government filming board was still unsure if **EMBUN** was going to be sent out to international film festivals this month.



(Insider information or rants from the lunatic fringe...stuff found in our In Box)

RUMORS

Word on the street has it that some hot scenes were cut from **SO CLOSE** mostly those between **Shu Qi** and Korean hunk **Seong-Heon Song**. The steamy celluloid was left on the cutting room floor supposedly because director **Corey Yuen** felt they were not necessary in telling the story. Our man in Hong Kong wonders, "Since when does being necessary mean anything? How much of any movie is necessary?" Though it sounds more like sour grapes on our man's part, you really should have heard him whining when he heard the rumors about the cuts to the scenes between **Zhao Wei's** lesbian character and **Karen Mok**. Just be satisfied with the sparks from their brief on screen interlude and then you can let your imagination run wild with the rumors.



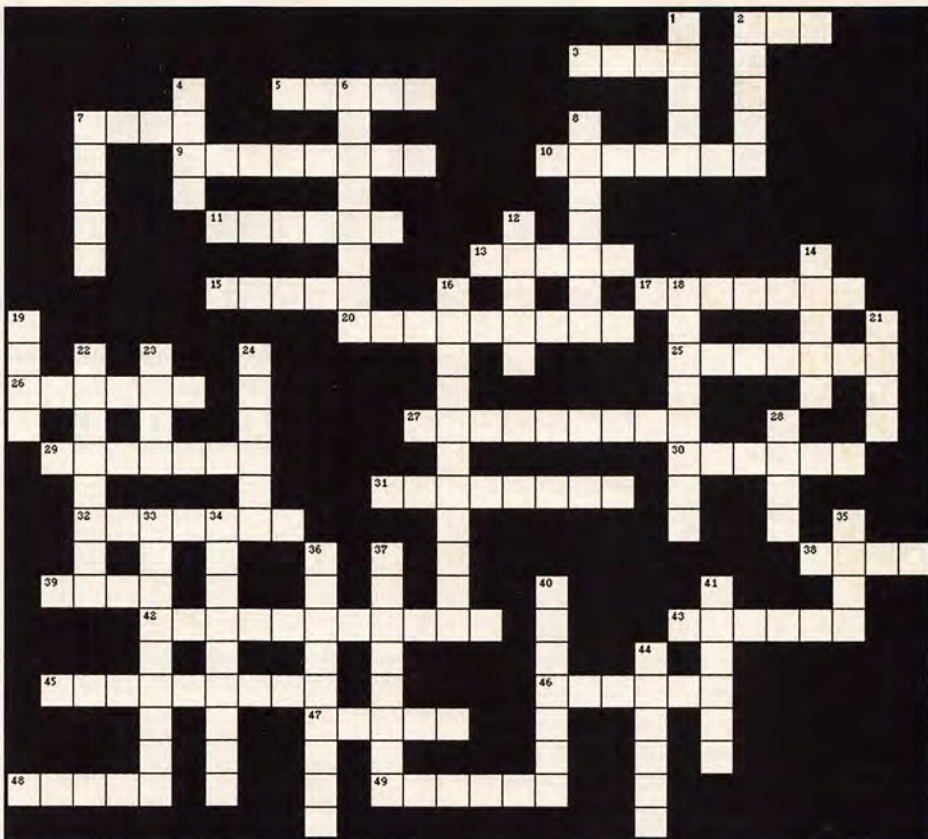
Here is your chance to prove your blonde intellect by naming the actress associated with the movie titles listed below. Put the last name only of a blonde actress associated with named film. The crossword is designed to test your memory skills of beautiful blonde actresses over the years - so don't cheat! It is easy to look up a movie title to find the answer... see how many you can get without any assistance!

ACROSS

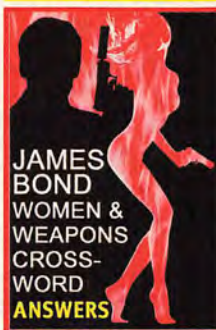
2. Midnight Lace
3. Twister
5. Queen of Outer Space
7. Hold That Blonde
9. The Glass House
10. Saturn 3
11. Niagra
13. Crime and Punishment in Suburbia
15. Rat Race
17. Vegas Vacation
20. Over the Brooklyn Bridge
25. Who is Clelio Tout?
27. Brigitte Jones Diary
29. Rock Star
30. Crossroads
31. I Dreamed of Africa
32. The Gay Bride
38. License to Drive
39. Hanging Up
42. The Crush
43. Almost Famous
45. Star 80
46. Mighty Joe Young
47. A Walk to Remember
48. Dead Sexy
49. Lucky Numbers

DOWN

1. Basic Instinct
2. The Virgin Suicides
4. I'm No Angel
6. Blue Crush
7. Cry Baby
8. Dick Tracy
12. Psycho
14. Fatal Attraction
16. Legally Blonde
18. Barb Wire
19. Grease
21. The Sweetest Thing
22. Vacation
23. I Married a Woman
24. Imitation of Life
26. Bombshell
28. Drive Me Crazy
33. The Girl Can't Help It
34. Streets
35. Death Becomes Her
36. The Wedding Singer
37. China O'Brien
40. Shallow Hal
41. Romancing the Stone
44. Boogie Nights



Answers to our Blonde Trivia Crossword will appear in the next issue of *Sirens of Cinema*. Or you can retrieve the answers by going to our web site at www.sirensforcinema.com.



Answers to the crossword that appeared in *Sirens of Cinema* #3... shaken, not stirred.



SIRENS SOUND-OFF continued...

in American cinema has not been accompanied by a growth in coverage of Asian stars in the mainstream American press so *Sirens* is on the vanguard in this area, at least in half of this area since you basically only cover the female stars. Don't stop doing this. From the Anita Mui concerts to the terrifically insightful and informative Shu Qi article, you have opened the eyes and hopefully the minds of many American readers.

I have noticed that a lot of the people covered in the first three issues have skewed to the television arena instead of theatrical movies. Is this a matter of choice or is *Sirens* having difficulty making contact with movie stars? I see that you are not hiding any of your warts or bruises by printing a lot of letters from people who take issue with you but this topic is yet unmentioned. So maybe I am the only one so far who has noticed. But if this trend continues you might find yourself regarded in the same vein as TV Guide instead of Entertainment Weekly. And when will you pick up your schedule to print more often? Soon?

My major concern with *Sirens of Cinema*

is that you have been so diligent in emitting information that you seem to hold back on your opinions. Traces of humor and jest punctuate your news columns but your editorials have been bland and far from blunt. The small handful of interviews thus far have been lifeless as though the subject was answering a questionnaire instead of being chatted up by a living breathing interested interviewer. The Chona Jason and Almen Wong interviews are typical of this with no spark or pop to them at all. The Virginia Hey interview just ran rampant with nonsense and with no hope or intention on the part of the writer to make any sense of her story at all. The Yancy Butler article includes some quotes but not enough interaction. The Shu Qi article fared better but only because the writer made it clear that she was not interviewed and that her quotes were gathered at a press conference. He managed to bring her thoughts together coherently and interestingly within the article but it still would have been better if she were able to be "there" for the writing of the piece.

Will you consider adding columnists to *Sirens*? People love to read opinions and not just in movie reviews. You can tell

from the thoughtful responses to the letters in Sound Off that Gallagher and Collins have opinions and a very different way of presenting their thoughts. Why not a pro and con column on some subject they disagree about in each column. Though maybe it is likely that they agree on everything and that's why they put out the magazine together.

All told, *Sirens* is warmly received after 3 issues and should go on to reach even greater heights in issue 4. Please don't take my concerns as criticism because I am only tossing in my 2 cents about magazine that I have come to enjoy and I know that I couldn't enjoy even more if it pushed its boundaries even further.

Sincerely
Britney Tearsdale
(E-mail)

[Your points are well thought out and echo many of the same opinions here in our offices and from many other readers, Britney. You'll be happy to note that we've upped the interview quotient in this issue so you're "there" with Cherrie Ying, Ellen Dubin, Elvira and others. We hope you'll like it there. We're glad you like the differing opinions of

Hugh Gallagher and Kevin Collins and we wanted them to write some pro and con reviews but they couldn't agree on how to do it. - Soc]

Soundoff:

Ignorance of one's cultural history is no excuse for what Vicky Zhao-Wei did when she put on that disgraceful gear in New York. When I first saw this picture in *Sirens of Cinema* I was very angry with your management for perpetuating the hate that she advertised but then I take the time and understand that you have done all Chinese Americans a favor by showing what she did. Would any American actress be excused if she burned an American flag or if she wore a dress with a Nazi symbol on it? I don't think the public would be as kind as Zhao-Wei expects us to be. If an American actress said that she was not aware of the Holocaust it would not be an acceptable excuse. Vicky cannot be excused for not studying her schoolbooks to learn about and understand Nanking and other atrocities the Japanese inflicted upon us.

You are right to report these things. I appreciate that you have covered Anita Mui

(Continued on page 61)

THE VOTES ARE IN!

AMERICAN IDLE minds speak out! Contest results go global!

The folks in the home office back in Glen Carbon thought they'd sit around and basically kick back and relax during the dog days of summer. Didn't figure there'd have much to do except to sit around and wait for the next issue of *Sirens of Cinema* to come out when the leaves turn brown. What they hadn't reckoned on was the unexpected enormous response to our Shill Contest from our summer. Looks like you all didn't sit idle on your vacations. As the summer temperatures heated up, so did our poll and contest results.

A few months ago we asked you to tell us who you thought was the most overrated actress and the most underrated actress. We didn't limit your ballots to movie stars or television stars and we imposed no geographical boundaries either. Even still, we kind of assumed that the votes would be concentrated around just a few media darlings and demons and that we'd be able to sort this all out on a warm Friday afternoon before heading out for the weekend. Looks like we underrated our readership!

The final tallies ran well into the thousands of votes. Probably about 10 times more than we ever expected. Sure, some of the biggest names garnered the biggest vote tallies in both the over- and underrated categories but the quirky constituency out there poured in votes for actresses from India to Hong Kong across North and South America and straight on over through Europe. For every ballot cast for a marquee Hollywood star, there was the insightful nod for Mayberry's favorite **Arlene Golonka** or a Bollywood idol such as **Ravenna Tandon**.

In fact, the votes received were so extraordinarily high, that we'll invite you to visit our website at www.sirenssofcinema.com to get a complete listing of the tallies – or send a postcard to us at: Shill Contest Results c/o Sirens of Cinema, PO Box 587, Glen Carbon, IL 62034.

At the core of the contest was our top prize of our **Kirsten Dunst Giveaway Package**. The lucky winner would receive a bunch of our DVDs and videos that we reviewed in our career overview of Spiderman's best gal in *Sirens of Cinema* #3. Check your mailbox, **Rudy D'Allesandro** of Rockville, Maryland. You not only correctly assessed the mood of our voting public, you also advised us to "compare [Julia Roberts] to any of the wonderful comic or dramatic actresses in Hong Kong cinema, particularly **Anita Mui**, who's shown the range to do both." We take it

that Rudy believes that Julia can't seem to make the thespian stretch as well as Hong Kong's dominant *bella diva*. And for making that point, Rudy's taking home the video package. More Dunst to you, Rudy.

At the heart of the matter, of course, are the results of our survey. This was democracy in its purest form as our actual ballots included no nominees for Most Overrated or Most Underrated; every vote received was a pure write-in.

Our biggest surprise was a happy one, indeed. *Sirens of Cinema* may be the preeminent US magazine to be publicizing the recent accomplishments of Hong Kong superstar **Anita Mui**. We're not sure if we've been so insightful enough that we have predicted a popular trend towards the many talents of the Ever-Changing Mui or if our coverage of the Queen of Asian Entertainment has been the flame to attract her loyal legions of fans to our pages ...and thus to our ballot box (er...website). Granted, Mui's practically an unknown factor here in the US, but she's not even given her due by the press in China or Hong Kong where she far and away the most popular female entertainer in terms of fan recognition and popular admiration. In either case, we've been on board the Mui World Tour Express ever since our second issue and we'll keep chugging along and delivering the Anita-news from all corners of the globe until the tour completes sometime in 2003. Even more amazing, Anita racked up her 11.2% of the worldwide vote without having even one Overrated vote cast against her. And that 11.2% surpassed the totals of her next two closest "Underrateds" combined!

Anita Mui, *Sirens of Cinema* salutes you!

Perhaps it's no surprise that **Julia Roberts** copped the dubious distinction of being the Most Overrated Actress. After all, since she probably generates more publicity in a single day than most other actresses can in a lifetime, there's was likely no chance that she was going to rate high in the underrated category. What was so overwhelming, however, is the rate at which the *Pretty Woman* eclipsed (de-clipsed?) everyone else in this category and the venom expressed in some of the accompanying essay submissions. (See related story.) Julia copped nearly 18% of the Overrated votes to top both this category and to gain the distinction of

an overview by Kevin Collins

being the actress named most often in the poll...though her totals were only barely pumped up with a hardly inspiring 0.18% of the Underrated votes. Was America saying something here about Julia herself or was this a message to the muscles behind the Hollywood PR machines?

Place and Show in the Overrated category went to **Susan Sarandon** and **Whoopi Goldberg**, respectively. From the comments included with Sarandon's votes, only a few seemed to be shaking their heads at her thespian skills while the vast majority were obviously shaking their fists at her political tirades. But while we break down the reasons the votes were cast, we don't separate the totals and a whopping 6.67% of worldwide voters suggest that the shine on Susan's star is duller than the paint job on Thelma and Louise's powder blue Thunderbird.

Finding Whoopi Goldberg finishing so strongly (?) in the Overrated category took us by surprise though. Not that we've ever considered the Whoop-meister in line for Katherine Hepburn's acting throne, but she's always managed to bring a smile to our faces in most of her big screen outings – even in some of the lame ones. But we're not arbiters of the votes, we're only the counters. Whoopi showed at 5.22% of the Overrated votes.

Back on the sunny side of the street, the 2nd and 3rd place Underrated vote-getters were massive surprises to everyone at *Sirens Central*. **Wendie Malick** – everyone's favorite ex-wife, Judith, on HBO's landmark *Dream On* and everyone's favorite primetime ex-model/drug addled/alcoholic/fashion editor (with a heart of gold), **Nina Van Horn** on NBC's neurotic everyone-loves-to-hate hit *Just Shoot Me* – edged out the pro's pro of blonde character actresses **Corinne Bohrer** – you know her, you just think you don't – for the second spot, with 5.53% to 5.09%.

So look around these pages and see the results of expressing your opinions. If you voted, see if the world thinks like you. If you didn't vote, just feel free to chime in now with your opinions. Drop a letter in the post or send us an e-mail. We're always open to a great debate. And if you don't want to address your opinions to us, just argue about this amongst yourselves.

OUR READERS BEG, “DON'T GO AWAY MAD, JUST GO AWAY!”

In our first official *Sirens of Cinema* reader contest we asked you to tell us which actress you thought was getting too much attention from the press. Though everyone didn't agree, it appears as though our readership didn't hesitate to get their frustrations off their chest. With the voting net cast wide over hundreds of actresses from all over the world being asked to “keep it down a bit,” the nearly 18% total tallied by **Julia Roberts** was more than enough for us to declare her to be the landslide winner as **The Most Over-**

Albert O'Dalby looks at the losers...

rated Actress in the World. This is not a title that we bestow easily or with any satisfaction, we're merely echoing the sentiment of our readers. From the tone of some of the essays included with the votes, some of the voters wish that Julia – or at least her PR people – would be buried under that landslide. Let's take a look at the 5 biggest losers ... the five women who received the most Overrated votes from *Sirens of Cinema* readers in 17 different countries.



Julia Roberts in *ERIN BROCKOVICH*
©2000 - Universal Pictures, Inc.

1

**JULIA
ROBERTS - 17.91%**

Atlanta born Julia first came to our attention in one of her earliest films, 1988's **MYSTIC PIZZA**. This was only a few short months after playing second fiddle to Family Ties cutie Justine Bateman in the chick flick flop **SATISFACTION**. 1989's **STEEL** **MAGNOLIAS** confirmed there was no doubt that a rising star was in our midst. When Roberts appeared in the following year's mega hit **PRETTY WOMAN**, this talented young actress suddenly became a celebrity. Some career lulls and ugly pit stops (anyone remember **MARY REILLY** or **I LOVE TROUBLE?**) But Roberts paid her dues and kept plugging along with uneven performances and the just-occasional-enough box-office success to keep her profile percolating about the Hollywood A-list line. Her much ballyhooed Academy Award® winning performance in 2000's **ERIN BROCKOVICH** caused us all to watch the embarrassing spectacle of her self-serving acceptance speech. But, we were willing to cut her a little slack at the time because she's been around forever and Hollywood's politicized awards are no longer the acknowledgment of achievement that they used to be. Even though she's no longer *The pretty woman* that her publicists and the media claim she is, everyone in Hollywood seemed to want her to win and she just

gave them what they wanted...more Julia Roberts than any normal human being could ever stand.

For some reason no one in Hollywood has even seemed to notice that Roberts has laid six consecutive cinematic bombs on us since **ERIN BROCKOVICH**...but our readers have picked up the scent! And therein lies our readers' main bone of contention. It would take the average actress a decade or so to make six stinkers. But because of her fame, Hollywood muscle and inexplicable free pass with the tabloids, Roberts has the push to inflict the likes of **THE MEXICAN**, **AMERICA'S SWEETHEARTS** and **FULL FRONTAL** on us in rapid succession. Well, pretty lady, the people have spoken and they're not holding back on the venom.

Illinois' favorite son **Jim Daulton** writes, “[Roberts] never was any one's idea of pretty except for Hollywood's mind melding PR machine. She should retire and become the Rolling Stones new logo.”

Britain's **Nigel Tow** picked up a copy of *Sirens of Cinema* in Boston and decided that he had to chime in on the Roberts' topic before heading back to England, “Julia Roberts is a product of publicity. Her craft lacks any subtlety and her so-called beauty consists of a smile that looks like a horse.”

We don't want to beat a dead horse, or even a theme into the ground, so we'll spare you the laundry list of voters' comments that often cruelly poked fun at Roberts' so-called equine resemblance. Beauty, after all, is in the eye of the beholder and millions upon millions of movie ticket buyers can't all be wrong, can they? **Kanlyn Liang** from New York expressed an opinion more in line with our voters than with the box-office receipts, “Roberts beautiful?? She's not even pretty. Her mouth is waaaaa too big!!!” We didn't charge Kanlyn for the extra a's and punctuation marks.

Not everyone agreed with the naysayers regarding Roberts' beauty. **Geoff Coltrane** from Sydney, Australia send us an e-mail vote begging for more, “Hollywood, please send us more of the Prettiest Pretty woman ever created.”



“Julia Roberts male co-stars are better looking and more talented than she is,” says voter George Williams (*THE MEXICAN* ©2001 - DreamWorks)

In voting for **Juhi Chawla** for Most Underrated Actress, **Aditya Varadaraj** from India took a decided sideswipe at Roberts, “[This] Indian actress is so much more versatile than plain [Roberts] who has no magic for Indian audiences. We don't find her [to be] the pretty woman.”

From what we've gleaned, as many voters were upset about what they perceived to be Roberts' overrated beauty as they were about her overrated talent. While many acknowledged that she has appeared in more than her share of certified hit films, few voters were gracious enough to give Julia's talent even the slightest amount of begrudging credit for those successes. **Paul Mehue** from Milwaukee tried to explain, “People pay the bucks to see over-hyped movies that Roberts just happens to be in – any dime a dozen could play those roles. She doesn't bring any talent to the dance.” An interesting point, Paul, but there's plenty of critics who might disagree and, at over 25 words, your essay – incisive as it may be – didn't meet our regulations.

Some voters were disgusted at Roberts using her celebrity status for political influence. **Pam Wycoff** from points unknown professed a strong sense of anger with her e-mail essay, “When Roberts gives the rest of her money to charity and lives on \$40K like most Americans, then she can ask Congress to raise my taxes.” A Floridian e-mailer known as **Coney-on-line** continued this frequent “pipe down, Julia” theme, “No cause, no matter how good, should be tax-inflicted on anyone without consent. If you believe in it, Julia, then pay the tab.” Realizing that he was running at our 25-word limit, Coney-on-line attempted a second, illegal vote, and added, “Rich pampered celebrities should lead by example, not by asking us to pay more for any cause.” We get your message, Coney, but, like Paul above, you're disqualified.

Politics and charity aside, the beguiling Ms. Roberts is a true Hollywood star by any measurement. Whether or not her current celebrity status will become legendary or dissipate with another couple of flop films is a question for the ages.

Even our *Sirens of Cinema* staff was in flux on Roberts' celebrity. Publisher **Hugh Gallagher** came down strongly in agreement with our voters: “She lost me at the start with **PRETTY WOMAN**. Teaming her with the equally overrated Richard Gere was something I could never recover from. Someone should have checked the definition of “pretty” before going in.”

Ouch!

Staff editor **Kevin Collins** hardly disagreed but was slightly more diplomatic, “I've never quite understood the Julia Roberts' phenomena but I guess my contrary vote was tantamount to spitting into the wind. She's a box office smash in every sense of the word so I'll tip my hat to her and just shake my head in dismay in the shadows. I just take note that no one ever talks about her ability or talent. When every one of her bombs, her acting was one of the reasons the fuses were lit. It's never a matter of matching Roberts to the perfect role; it's always trying to match her marketability to the proper project.”

One voter from the UK who hid under the screen moniker of **Minceyboy**, decided to forfeit any chance of winning our contest and knowingly blasted through our 25-word essay limit to explain why her voted for Julia Roberts as Most **Underrated** Actress! With an essay that broke the rules (both of the contest and of the written English language) but managed to encompass nearly

every negative rap possible on Julia, Mincey moaned, in part, "Let's face it, America created Julia Roberts just like it created Oprah. Two...females that are shoved down the throats of the rest of the world. Now she has become a Frankenstein monster that laughs like a hyena...and you tell us that she is a pretty woman? Keep her in America and spare the rest of us. I vote for her as Underrated because Americans will only take their praise of her to an even higher level with her next stupid inane laugh-and-snort movie with some dumb actor fawning over her like she is a goddess when she is really a pinched-faced talent less tool who makes millions of dollars and then has the nerve to ask your government to tax the little people for research money when she could do one movie for free and fund it on her own. She's underrated because her hold on America's pulse...is insidious and Hollywood's publicity machine is her tool for evil. (Sorry, my disgust for this woman takes more than 25 words. I may lose the contest...)" We agree with you on that last point, Mincey... you lose!



THE BANGER SISTERS © Fox Searchlight Pictures

2 SUSAN SARANDON - 6.67%

BULL DURHAM, THE HUNGER, THELMA AND LOUISE...not that Susan Sarandon, you say?

Yes. So say our readers.

Born in post-WWII Jackson Height, New York, young Susan participated in a college freshman show and met fellow future husband and actor **Chris Sarandon** at Catholic University in Washington, DC. She credits Chris with having that major influence on her to become a professional actress. She did some early modeling work, put in some time on a few afternoon soap operas in New York and then headed west to Hollywood and quickly found parts in films by **Sidney Lumet** and the **Billy Wilder**. Not many other actresses can proudly claim that they were costarring with **Jack Lemmon** (**THE FRONT PAGE**) and **Robert Redford** (**THE GREAT WALDO PEPPER**) in their first year in the movie business.

The string of hit films and memorable roles have never seemed to stop coming. Sarandon's work is continually critically acclaimed and no one in the Sirens' office had anything negative to say about this thespian's thespian.

But plenty of voters did.

Our editor Kevin Collins prefaces the readers' essays by commenting, "Some of her early stuff really impressed me...who can forget her in **THE ROCKY HORROR PICTURE SHOW**? I wasn't a fan of **BULL DURHAM** but overall her talent at creating characters is very impressive. In recent years her public persona may have taken a few hits because of some questionable political comments and actions. I'll bet a lot of her negative votes came from readers in New York City."

Collins is only partially correct. A lot of the Overrated votes for Susan did come from New York City but the overwhelming majority of them came in from around the country. And almost every one of them cited her overt political partisanship and abuse of the soapbox as reason for disliking her so much.

Ray Denton from Ontario managed to keep politics out of the fray and said he though Sarandon was overrated because, "...she's treated like a god in the pantheon of all-time actresses [but] she's done nothing noteworthy, including **BULL DURHAM**."

Not that Sarandon didn't have her supporters, too. **Deb Frederick** from Philadelphia had a difficult time making up her mind saying it was a "toss up between Sarandon and Catherine Deneuve who were both super in **THE HUNGER**."

Matt Margolis hails from Connecticut, just a stone's throw north of New York City. His take on Sarandon wasn't too positive to begin with and it dimmed even more when her political pandering was factored in, "Sarandon's thinly veiled anti-Republican facism disguised as leftist liberalism have overshadowed (sic) any meager talents she once displayed." Matt didn't mention if he liked Susan's performance in 1985's **MUSSOLINI**.

Christian Vainask of New York just couldn't make up his mind about who was more overrated. Rather than to leave a hanging chad, he just went ahead and split his vote between Susan and the eventual winner Roberts. He wasn't very undecided in his opinion though, "If I wanted to listen to long-winded liberal speeches by pampered Hollywood celebrities, I need look no further than Roberts or Sarandon." He cut them no slack for being so convenient.

Sirens of Cinema attempts to be global in our views and most definitely pro-American in our politics. We try not to preach conservative or liberal agendas. Our readers and voters have their right to their political opinions and, in the cases of Roberts and Sarandon it seems, they also seem to prefer to hear their political opinions from pros, politicians and pundits...not from Hollywood's high-priced and well-fed elite. We don't have to agree or disagree. We only have to publish our poll results.

3 WHOOP! GOLDBERG - 5.22%

One of the craziest results in this entire poll was the placement of **Whoopi Goldberg** in the number 3 spot in the Overrated category. Why was it crazy, because relatively few voters who cited Whoopi as overrated bothered to include entry essays to explain their choice. So even though they had their say, they didn't say why they said it.

Is she overrated? She began her film career in Steven Spielberg's unevenly received **THE COLOR PURPLE**. Known primarily for her TV appearances, she's nonetheless strung together about 40 or so film roles. **JUMPIN' JACK FLASH** could have ended



THE ASSOCIATE © Buena Vista Pictures

some performers career in the proverbial flash but Whoopi hung in there to do **GHOST** and **SISTER ACT**... okay, she did **SISTER ACT II**, maybe she should have quit that franchise while she was ahead! Trekkies treasure her 5 years worth of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* appearances as Guinan. Along with Billy Crystal, she's matched talent and ego with Robin Williams for the great Comic Relief benefits. She's won an Oscar, two Golden Globes, a BAFTA, a Grammy, a Tony and a couple of Emmys. So how come she's overrated?

Jim Catcavidge who supplied us with only a collegiate e-mail address went along with the polling trends but bucked all those award committees with a short but not so sweet essay: "She is a terrible actress!" Not worth arguing what the meaning of what "is" is to Jim, is there?

Louis Rodriguez from Alcobendas in Spain didn't go into much detail when he e-bellowed us with, "America, keep your Whoopi to yourselves." Okay, Louis. So we surmise that *Hollywood Squares* isn't a big hit on the Iberian peninsula.

Sirens publisher Gallagher rushed tepidly to Whoopi's defense. "She may be one of the hardest working actresses in Hollywood but little of it is mainstream and most goes straight to video. With her grocery list of movies you are bound to find a title or two worth watching, although it is questionable whether the good outweighs the bad. I personally enjoyed her as Vera Baker in the hilarious **RAT RACE** and I truly wish her late-night talk show would have lasted as it was one of the better talk shows ever produced - exceedingly better than **Rosie O'Donnell**'s who happens to be a person that is completely untalented and should have been at the top of the Overrated list."

Hugh's got a point. There are plenty of interesting roles that Whoopi has played on film. She may have landed so high on the Overrated list because Americans most likely see her most often accosting us from that dreadfully unfunny center square...where she never shook the shadow of the legendary Paul Lynde.

We're not going to argue with Hugh about Rosie O'Donnell - he signs our paychecks, you know - but America somehow didn't see eye to eye with our benevolent publisher. O'Donnell tied for 73rd place on the Overrated list with well less than half a percentage point of votes received. On the flip side, Rosie didn't even register a tiny blip on the Underrated screen.

There's got to be some reason why America thinks

Whoopi is overrated. We're still waiting for someone to voice an opinion worthy enough to back up these numbers.



4 JENNIFER LOPEZ - 4.24%

There's a time in every performer's career when the popularity bubble bursts and the honeymoon with fans ends. That dreaded downtime can either be quickly overcome or it can linger and fester for years on end. Ever since **Jennifer Lopez** broke big time in **SERENA**, she's been a major star. She spent years before that big break working as a dancer and appearing on TV as one of the infamous Fly Girls. Her film career has been uneven but it's been nothing to be ashamed of. She's young, beautiful, talented and famous...with questionable but certainly eye-catching fashion sense. What could be wrong? According to many of our voters, maybe - just maybe - J.Lo is a bit too famous for her boots.

Since she's got record sales up the ying-yang enough to warrant her superstar status, why would anyone feel Jennifer is overrated? Maybe it's because now you can even buy J.Lo products so that you can smell like Jennifer? But has anyone ever complained about how Jennifer smells?

What is going on here?

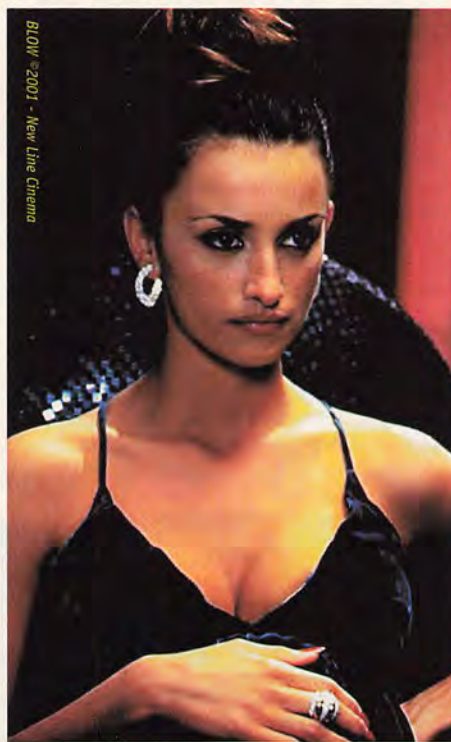
Joe Pantoliano - who signs himself as **Dynamo Joe** - certainly wasn't looking at the big picture when he sized up Jennifer's overall career with, "I'm amazed that someone has managed to build a career based upon her ass size." Joe's entitled to his opinion, as crude as it may be. **Steven Casado** pulled no punches - and scored no points with our female staff members - when he chirped up with, "The **BOOTY** needs to rest. BTW, what's the dealio with the "boy toy" ex-husband?" As for the first part of Steven's statement, we disagree. As for the second part, we don't know.

It was comments like Joe's and Steven's that had our editor burning angry. Collins had asked us not to denigrate this story and to avoid demeaning physical references. Sorry, but we had to tell the

truth, at least as our readers told it to us. It was clear that Kevin didn't think Lopez deserves to be called overrated. "J.Lo's just starting to experience that first wave of public backlash. She probably would have gone through this a couple of years earlier but the public gave her a grace period while they were praying for her to survive Puffy. Any negative feedback to her now is likely just a reflection on her celebrity status not a knock on her considerable talents."

There must be some interesting exchanges of opinions at Sirens' board meetings because Hugh Gallagher has a take on J.Lo that skewed quite differently than Collins, "Anyone that needs a 100-person entourage to take care of her personal needs is bound to catch some flack. She can only hope that her status remains intact as she would never be able to afford the lifestyle she has grown accustomed to if she winds up singing at open mike night at the local tavern."

Apparently Hugh's local tavern doesn't provide TVs, VCRs, CD-players, all white decors, mangos, green seedless grapes, apple pie a la mode, honey peanut Balance bars, red roses with yellow trim, beans, rice and chicken, among scores of other demands that Jennifer typically imposes on her venues. No wonder he's so jealous.



5 PENELOPE CRUZ - 2.66%

Sometimes you are known for the company you keep. Before 1998 **Penelope Cruz** had no chance to be underrated or overrated by our American readers. She was practically unknown. Pretty Pe - that's her nickname, guys, Pe - paid her acting dues in her homeland of Spain. Schooled in dance in Madrid, Pe's also theatrically trained and had a sizeable list of film credits (including **JAMON**, **JAMON** and **BELLE EPOQUE**) behind her before she ever appeared on American screens. English speaking audiences were first acquainted to Cruz in 1998's **THE HI-LO COUNTRY** but she's better known for standout turns in **WOMAN ON TOP** and **ALL THE PRETTY HORSES**. **CAPTAIN CORELLI'S MANDOLIN**

was hardly anybody's instrument of choice, **BLOW** was incredibly confusing and appearing opposite Tom Cruise in **VANILLA SKY** has been somewhat of a good news/bad news situation for Pe. If you didn't catch her in any of the above-mentioned films, we're sure you noticed her at last years Academy Awards - she was a red carpet standout.

She's a star but hardly anywhere near superstar status yet, so how come so many voters went so negative on Pretty Pe?

Tara Mattingly, a Sirens reader from our opening issue, seemed a bit miffed at Penelope's sudden stardom, sounding off with: "Would we hear so much about Penelope if not for Tom? I think not. They should both go back to Europe and leave us alone." We have a hunch who Tara would be voting for if the category was Overrated Actor.

Arizona's star Sirens' reader **Kyung Mi Babb** appears to be on the same track as Tara, tweaking Penelope for her association with Mr. Show-Me-The-Money, "Penelope would be just another import actress with average talent if not for being propped up by image-minded Tom."

Penelope made the rumor rounds when it was reported that she turned vegetarian after appearing in **ALL THE PRETTY HORSES** with Matt Damon. Perhaps that's what inspired Texan Jack Damon to quip, "If **PRETTY HORSES** caused Penelope to give up meat, then her recent work with **Tom Cruise** is making me think twice about eating vanilla." That's a long way to go for a joke, Jack.

Kevin our editor again, "I don't have any problems with Penelope Cruz as an actress. She may be the complete package. Only time will tell. I think a lot of people think she's stepped over a lot of hurdles by hooking up with Tom Cruise. That may or may not be so, but she's certainly shown some decent acting chops - especially in her work with [Pedro] Almodóvar."

Mr. Gallagher gets the final word here, "Penelope is both attractive and talented, I think her downfall is her association with the incredibly overrated Tom Cruise. I believe she will prosper as an actress if she can break away from his guiding hands... just as Nicole Kidman went onto shine once she lost the Cruise control."

Both Gallagher and Collins agreed off the record that the voters probably got it wrong by taking their anti-Tom anger out on Pe. But it's the voters who count, not Sirens management, so we've been happy to have you share their angst and we appreciate that you let them vent their anger.

If you disagree - and we're sure plenty of you do - don't hesitate to let us know your opinion.

OVERRATED ACTRESSES: THE SECOND GROUP OF FIVE

6. KIM CATTRALL - 2.48%
7. MERYL STREEP - 1.68%
8. PAULA ABDUL - 1.50
9. ANGELA BASSETT - 1.50%
10. WINONA RYDER - 1.41%

READ ALL THE QUOTES AND SEE THE REST OF THE VOTES AT:

www.sirenssofcinema.com

– THE BEST ACTRESSES YOU HARDLY EVER HEAR ABOUT

When the votes began rolling in for

the votes, we took note that a good portion of Mui's Underrated Votes did not include any choice for an overrated actress. Are Anita's fans so consumed with her goodness that they could not take it upon themselves to cast a stone or spit in someone's eye? You decide.

grabbing are so passé now for Anita that we can hardly wait to see what she comes up with next. Her current Fantasy Gig (see *Sirens of Cinema*, No. 3 – Ed.) has included full sized ship replicas, female to female lip-locking, daring and baring costumes, ghostly graveyard scenarios, countless fan-pleasing encores, and – most importantly of all – the most amazing voice singing the most incredibly diverse songs that you'll ever want to hear.

And that's only half the Mui story because she has also become one of the most outstanding film actresses in the world. Though she has continued to shun the international scene and has stuck to her native Hong Kong cinema, her performances in such varied fare as **HEROIC TRIO** (1992), **RUMBLE IN THE BRONX** (1994), Jet Li's **THE ENFORCER** (1995 aka "**My Father's A Hero**" or "**My Father's Letter**"), and **DRUNKEN MASTER 2** (1995) have managed to sneak into some American theaters and onto some TV stations in English-dubbed versions. Stateside reviews of **DRUNKEN MASTER 2** as a whole were tepid at best but most reviews took note of Anita's standout comic performance as **Jackie Chan's** stepmother. Mui has won critical acclaim for her moving performances in films such as **FATE** (1984 for which she won the Best Supporting Actress trophy at the Hong Kong Film Awards), **ROUGE** (1987, Best Leading Actress as a woeful wandering ghost), **EIGHTEEN SPRINGS** (1997 – Best Supporting Actress for an unusually unsympathetic role), **WU YEN** (2000 – where she played a mad-cap male emperor and a hapless male ghost), and **JULY RHAPSODY** (2002 – for which she was just named Best Actress at the Changchun Film Festival).

That's a pretty impressive career with a ton of awards and recognition – and yet, unless you've been an avid reader of *Sirens of Cinema*, if you've been living in the US or in Europe over the past 20 years, you've probably never even heard of her or have seen her name in the press. And our voters registered their unhappiness about that very fact.



1 ANITA MUI -11.2%

Contest contestant **Brent J. Nordquist** said it simply but effectively, "*Anita Mui has been the 'secret siren' for far too long.*" As readers of *Sirens of Cinema* know, we've devoted plenty of time and space reporting on Anita Mui's current moveable feast, the worldwide FANTASY GIG 2002 tour. It's been an honor for us to assume the unique position as the sole American magazine source of news about Anita Mui – and most of the other stars and idols from Hong Kong and the rest of the world for that matter.

Mui was born in 1963 and was a serious and studious child who began singing in nightclubs when she was only 4. She developed a strong independent streak that has marked her personality and public persona for her entire life. She turned professional in 1982 when she copped the top prize at the First New Talent Singing Contest in Hong Kong – a contest she was covertly entered into by her sister who didn't even inform her until the last minute. Think *"American Idol"* and then add the pace and frenzy of the Hong Kong media and you'll have some idea of the pressure under which this 18-year old performed and succeeded.

From that moment on, Mui's singing and acting career has been going full steam. Her amazing singing voice and continually evolving style has kept her leagues ahead of her competition in the Hong Kong pop field. Her world tours have

become famous for her stamina, her engaging on stage rapport with her fans, and for her inventiveness. She even outlasted her band in a recent California performance, singing countless *a cappella* encores to her devout disciples.

With over 40 albums under her belt, awards and recognition for her musical talents seemed to be never-ending and they probably could have gone on forever. Having been named Most Popular Female Singer in Hong Kong an unprecedented 5 years in a row, Anita selflessly announced that she would no longer accept any more awards for her singing. She wasn't making her music to receive awards. She wanted other singers to gain their deserved recognition.

Remember **Britney Spears** canoodling with her snake at the MTV Video Awards? Old hat, my friend. Anita slithered with the slimies a decade ago, terrorizing, tantalizing and delighting her shocked live audiences with some particularly unfriendly boas. Yes, Anita Mui, you see, is not your typical Hong Kong icon who fits the preferred mold. She's been breaking down barriers and raising eyebrows for 20 years and it seems that her fans won't be satisfied if there's only 20 more. Her onstage sensuality goes beyond the limits according for some of her more staid Hong Kong critics: but breast massaging and crotch

[illegible]



Qing Hao Li of Brooklyn had an insight to the lack of Mui-mania outside of Asia, "Unfortunately, Mui is unknown to Americans. Her acting talents are universal but she is too humble to promote herself shamelessly. Acting or singing, she's phenomenal." A humble celebrity, Qing? Isn't that some kind of oxymoron? From what other Mui-admirers submitted, we guess it isn't.

Chiu Hin Sing of San Francisco concurred, "Anita is kind and gentle and an actual role model for children around the world and for aspiring singers and actresses." As if to underscore this insight into Anita, **Wince Chan** from Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia took a more personal view, "I love Anita most [because] she is a nice and brave girl and always helps her friends and, most importantly, she's a good singer." We're not sure if America is ready for a celebrity who is genuinely nice instead of just publicly nice. Mui's work with charity is extensive but unlike the average celebrity who picks a cause and lends his or her name, she takes the more hands on approach, managing and overseeing charitable foundations.

The view from Johnson City, New York, was expressed best by **Ron Li**, "There is very little news about Anita despite the fact that she's starred in 3 Jackie Chan films, 3 Chow Yun-fat films and a Jet Li film. She's an awesome actress that's been overlooked by everyone."

Lest one thinks that Mui's fans – even those in the U.S. and Europe are only those of Asian heritage – let's hear from all sides. **Ed Hummingbird** of Dallas summed up Anita's résumé, "Anita Mui does it all – singing, acting, high-flying action. She was a 10 in the film *HEROIC TRIO*." **Kristin Burns** from FSU submitted this cybernote, "Mui, in *MIDNIGHT FLY*, turns in a performance worth of any Hitchcock actress and it was entirely overlooked in the United States. Shameful." **Denise Francia** who took the Mui Fantasy Gig in Oakland was mesmerized, "Anita: Those eyes, those amazing eyes. Anita is incredible." **John Heideman** from Marina Del Ray was there too, "Thanks to Sirens I bought Anita Mui concert tickets... [this] great actress is such a great singer and only Sirens knew the secret in the U.S.? Crazy!" But, John, we didn't want it to be a secret, that's

why we shared it with you.

Sirens own resident Anita expert, **Vanessa Fan** mused over the American Non-Phenomenon, "I haven't seen any ambition shown from Anita that she wants to hit in the U.S. She is not the same case as Jackie Chan or Michelle Yeoh who had a few American made movies and got accepted in the mainstream. Honestly, I was shocked to see so many Americans knew about Anita. [Before Sirens of Cinema] I didn't think HK movies are that popular to anyone in a foreign country, especially *HEROIC TRIO* – I never knew so many people watched it. As for this underrated matter...it's because no one knows about her, that's why no one talks about her, easy and simple."

His devotion to Anita ranks close to Vanessa's, that's why Sirens editor **Kevin Collins** said, "I really shouldn't comment. I am an unabashed fan and I think my opinion is highly biased. There's been no one like her since the days of Judy Garland. When you take all of the elements of entertainment into account, Anita is simply the most underrated entertainer in the world...Well, maybe she has to learn to play the guitar or pulls rabbits out of a hat or something."

Publisher **Hugh Gallagher** acknowledges Mui's talents with a different slant on things, "Forget the singing, Mui is the master of comedy. Her facial expressions, movements and flawless timing are nothing less than comic genius. Her unforgettable scene in *RUMBLE IN THE BRONX* where her grocery store is literally torn down while she sits on the toilet is classic." We always knew where Hugh's mind was.

We'll let some of our contest submissions close the door on our winner for you...

"Mui is the greatest force for good in Hong Kong entertainment. She should receive more American notice because she is talented and positive in every way." Thank you, **Pansy Chen** of San Francisco.

Justin Yau hotmailed us with his view, "Anita is cool and definitely a singer/actress with a hell of a lotta soul and spirit."

From the great Northwest comes Oregon's **Cindy Scholes**, "My husband likes kung-fu flix and they are fascinating. But only Anita Mui can do the fu and still amaze with comedy and drama."

From the mainland comes **Tristen Xu** of the People's Republic of China expressing a devotion common to Mui's fans, "[Anita's] accomplishment is so outstanding! I can't stand a life without her!"

San Francisco seems to one hotbed of Mui fandom, **Lennin Zul** gave us some cozy fodder for those cold winter nights, "Yim-Fong is the über-woman of my dreams!"

Yeo Peiting of Singapore was eliminated from our competition because her enthusiasm spilled way beyond our 25-word limit, but her thoughts give us something interesting to close on. "[Anita] is a really charming actress and you cannot really [find out] about her latest news anywhere. Is it just because she is 39 years old? Why are the new singers getting all the attention? They sing out of tune and they sing with no feelings. Anita Mui sings with her heart and you can really be touched by her songs. She can make all of her fans crazy about her and a Hong Kong newspaper proved it...her fans made a 2-page advertisement for her and the words are so touching."

Yeo, you'll be happy to know that we're sharing her fan craziness, see the ad on previous page.



2 WENDIE MALICK - 5.53%

My friend Binnie met her demise last season but we're sure she would have voted for Wendie Malick as one of our most underrated and under-appreciated actresses. In fact, according to our voters, Wendie is the Most Underrated Actress in America. A genuinely goodhearted human being who has quietly spent her entire acting career carving out one gem of a role after another, Malick has finally hit the big time in NBC's primetime hit *Just Shoot Me*. A typical day with Wendie's comic creation, that one big slice of fancy Nina Van Horn, is likely to start off something like this, "God I have such a headache. Maya, would you be a dear and grab the biggest, pinkest pill from my office?"

Malick is a Buffalo, New York native who has relocated with her husband and menagerie of dogs, horses and a cat to the Santa Monica Mountains. Her acting career took shape first on the stage after five years as a fashion model in New York, Paris and Madrid. Yes, those gorgeous photos of a young Nina Van Horn you see adorning the walls of her Blush fashion editor's office on *Just Shoot Me* are the real thing...well, the Wendie real thing, if not the Nina real thing. Lest you think that modeling and acting were all that was on young Wendie's mind, she also worked for **Jack Kemp** when he was a congressman in D.C.

Wendie has received multiple Emmy and a Golden Globe nomination for her role as Nina. TV land gasped audibly when she was somehow left off the Emmy nominations this past season, generally considered to be her strongest yet on *Just Shoot Me*. She was nominated in Los Angeles for an Artistic Directors Award as Best Lead Actress in Play for her performance in **Oliver Hailey's** "Round Trip" in 1995. Critics applauded her dual roles as both Dear Abby and Ann Landers in the 1999 TV movie "Take My Advice: The Ann and Abby Story." A couple of years ago she was honored by Women in Film as A Woman of Vision. And there's no forgetting her appearance on *Seinfeld* as the snooty physical therapist with the hairdo

from Hell.

Though Wendie's filmography is full and varied, she's undoubtedly best known for her work on *Just Shoot Me* and for her turn as Judith Tupper Stone on *Dream On* from 1990 to 1996 – where she was never underrated, winning 5 Cable Ace Awards as Best Actress in a Comedy Series.

Hugh Gallagher appreciates one of Malick's other talents, "My favorite Wendie Malick character? It is her distinctive voice as the cartoon character ChiCha in one of the best Disney movies ever produced, **THE EMPEROR'S NEW GROOVE**."

Editor **Kevin Collins** zones in on another one of her subtle talents, "She's deliciously and wickedly funny in everything I've ever seen her in. Her facial expressions – close-ups and throwaways – are priceless. When Nina suddenly realizes that her old nickname B.J. wasn't given to her because she always wore blue jeans...well, did I say priceless? Am I surprised she made the list? Yeah. I knew she was underrated but I didn't know anybody else noticed. And she's a wonderful person from all accounts."

Remembering a "classic" character Wendie gave life to in the superb Nina Van Horn A&E Biography parody episode, **Paula Jussay** from San Bruno, California, didn't mince her essay words when she summed up her vote for Wendie with, "Foxy Trouble." The staff at Sirens suggests that this may have been one of the best subversive episodes of sitcom television ever produced. Collins was particularly pained at the lack of Emmy acknowledgement for this episode, "It had to be the most researched and detailed half-hour of episodic comedy ever on American television. It proved beyond a doubt that Malick has created a character that appears superficial but who is actually deep, dark and oddly sympathetic. Forget Florida 2000, they should be investigating the Emmy nominations."

Whether Nina's...ahem...enjoying the effects of Jack Gallo's (George Segal) electrically charged office chair or his suped-up vibrating car seat, **Robin Holland** of Boston took notice, "No one has cuter primetime network orgasms than Wendie Malick." Robin adds wistfully, "I hope I am half as hot as her when I reach that 'certain' age." Sirens feels compelled to warn you, Robin, half as hot as Wendie is plenty hot, as our staff writer Casey Yip added, "Wendie's so hot she should be labeled like McDonald's coffee."

There's something to be said for an actress who can deftly deploy dialog laced with loony lingo such as "propipity, personfuntant," and "bittzlecocker" and get away with it. Having completely wrecked the language barrier, maybe this explains why fans in England – such as Sirens reader **K.A. Jane White** from Bath – have embraced Malick's malapropism-wizard Nina Van Horn, "The only American TV show worth watching is the biting *Just Shoot Me* with the rabidly hilarious Wendie Malick as Nina Van Horn."

"Judith Tupper to Claire Noodleman to Foxy Trouble to Ann and Abby to Nina Van Horn and drop dead sexy every step of the way." Louisiana's **Danny R. Von Kanel** knows how to connect the dots in the Malick character lineage – his ballot proved it.

Citizen, model, stage actress, sitcom siren sans parallèle, Wendie Malick can't help but bring a smile to your face. E-mailing voter **Todd Henderson** boiled it all down very simply for us,

"The funniest woman acting today is Wendie Malick of Just Shoot Me. [She's] clever, deft and she never overacts. She's absolutely fabulous."

Fabulous, you say?

We can't argue with that. In fact, she's fabulous, gorgeous and gracious. When she learned that she was voted as one of Sirens Most Underrated Actresses, Wendie gave a thumbs-up to our voters, "I am truly honored to be counted among your 'Most Underrated Actresses.' Thanks for the encouragement."

You're welcome, Wendie. And Thank You for the years of delight you've given us and for the many more to come.



3

**CORINNE
BOHRER - 5.09%**

As the most beautiful cast member in the ensemble, Corinne Bohrer starred opposite **George Clooney** on the TV show *ER*. She's even starred in two sitcoms of her own. You may not recognize the name but you will certainly recognize the beautiful face and the brilliantly flowing tresses of golden blonde hair. Corinne Bohrer is probably the most famous actress whose name you don't know. Never a face to be seen on a red carpet nor popping up on a TV chat show, Corinne just keeps going out there and churning out great performances in feature films, TV guest appearances, her own sitcoms and tons and tons of TV commercials. Her feature work has usually been of the "great role in a not-so-great movie" variety. Okay, no one's going to get their prints in Hollywood cement for roles in the **REVENGE OF THE NERDS** or **POLICE ACADEMY** series – especially if you were in those episodes that had Roman numerals after the titles, but that doesn't lessen the quality of her work.

Her career got started in 1982 with an appearance on TV's *Falcon Crest* and in the big screen comedies **I, THE JURY**, **JEKYLL AND HYDE TOGETHER AGAIN**, **ZAPPED!** and **MY FAVORITE YEAR**. The unevenness of her film vehicles had already begun to show.

It's time to come clean about our opening sentence. As if to underline just how close Corinne has come to the fame she deserves, she played beautiful but sometimes-ditzy nurse Cory Smith on the CBS 1984 sitcom *E/R*, not on the massive NBC hit with the similar name from the following decade. And though gorgeous George was also in the cast, they were both supporting players along with a pre-Seinfeld **Jason Alexander** to star **Elliot Gould** in this CBS curiosity that lasted only one season.

Free Spirit (1989) and *Double Rush* (1995) placed Bohrer as the leading lady in comedies whose situations placed her as a witch doubling as a nanny and as employee of a delivery service respectively. Corinne was the best thing about both shows but they, too, died premature TV deaths after only one season. Her character never took root, but we all stood up and noticed, as **Arye Gross'** girlfriend on the late lamented Fox sitcom *Herman's Head*.

She was memorable in her most seductive role as a golf course siren seducing Randy Quaid to potential doom in the superlative made-for-cable **DEAD SOLID PERFECT**. Staff members still sweat bullets when recalling that 1989 performance.

INCONCEIVABLE (1998) probably gave us best chance to get to know Corinne in a leading role on film, as her character Eve was racing against her biological clock in this poignant and warm-hearted comedy. But distribution for the film wasn't up to what the producers hoped so your best chances to catch the flick is to check your cable guide or check the shelves at your local video dealer.

If you watch fast you could've caught Corinne as the blonde cutie-pie in any number of TV commercials for the likes of McDonalds, Clorox, Ramada Inn, Sears, J.C. Penney, and A.T.&T. among countless others.

But it's no secret that our exposure to Corinne has been mainly limited to the roles she plays. Trying to find an in-depth interview with this skillful actress is all but a no-starter. We'd love to chew the fat with her about her career and her thoughts about acting. We'd love to be able to dispel her stereotype as the "blonde girl" and see her as the total package we're sure she is.

Our editor was delighted to find Bohrer ranking so high in our poll. "She's the very definition of underrated. I've loved her in everything she's done and you can tell that she is capable of so much more. Sure she's beautiful and sexy and all that but she also brims with intelligence and no one's really given her a chance to explore that in a role. Our voters got this right," **Collins** states.

Yahoo Group Moderator, **Forrest W. Ball**, who takes care of things at the "Corinne Bohrer's Friends" site mused upon his favorite actress, "I think Corinne received so many underrated votes [because] everyone knows her face [but] no one knows her name. She has more acting credits than most of the 'A List' performers, but still she remains obscure, and her fans resent it." Forrest also invites you to join him and the rest of Corinne's friends over at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/corinnebohrersfriends/>

Corinne's obviously got plenty of fans who voted in our survey. **Julie Davis** of Biddeford in Maine certainly knows Bohrer's name, "Corinne is a breath of fresh air. She is the ultimate modern comedienne with her combination of sexiness and subtle

ditzyness." **Betty Danesi** from Bradenton, Florida had some bigger fish to fry in her appraisal of our Miss Bohrer, "Corinne is a sweetie and so much cuter and sexier than old Meg Ryan." **R. Cannell** cyber-sent his demands simply as, "Sassy Corinne needs more roles!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!" He obviously was serious because those exclamation points don't come cheap!

Michael Radner hit the nail on the head and got our attention with his electronic ballot, "This cute little number has been around for years and I've never read a single article about her. How 'bout some press?"

Sassy. Cute. Intelligent. *Sirens of Cinema* shall do our best to explore all of Corinne Bohrer as near in the future as possible. We promise.



4 KIRSTEN DUNST - 3.34%

Geez, what can we say? We just spent 14 pages of our previous issue telling you all how great we think **Kirsten Dunst** is and how unlimited her potential appears to be ("Kirsten Dunst Movie Checklist," *Sirens of Cinema* #3).

Kirsten has been a successful working actress for years now and has already amassed an astounding number of credits. That she survived the hype of this summer's record breaking **SPIDER-MAN** and still comes out near the top in our Underrated category is astounding.

From **INTERVIEW WITH A VAMPIRE** through **THE VIRGIN SUICIDES**, **DROP DEAD GORGEOUS**, **BRING IT ON** and **DICK**, you could always count on Kirsten's smart portrayal of any kind of character thrown her way to add that certain touch of gloss with an edge to every film she's in.

Hugh Gallagher knows that any project with Dunst attached to it is bread already halfway buttered, "Anything that Kirsten is in is worth watching. It is a rare thing to have both talent and beauty in the same package and she has it in

spades! She will be one of the top box office attractions in the very near future."

Continuing with that look into the future, **Kevin Collins** added, "She's already accomplished so much but she's got a good chance to be a Katherine Hepburn-type a few decades from now. She's going to be revered that much for her talent. Between now and then she can do anything because she's that good...and a real honey!"

Sirens voters were just as enthusiastic about this Special K. From Arkansas, voter **Jamie Gilley** drew on the cheerleading theme of **BRING IT ON** with, "Kirsten rules cuz she's so cool, Bring it on, baby." Not exactly the stuff theses are created from, but the thought says it all.

Voter **Meaghan Skye** found the very question about who was the Most Underrated Actress to be obvious when she cast her vote for Kirsten, "Well, duh!" Duh it is, Meaghan... And you still have 23 words left to use. You can carry them over the next contest.

Orlando's **Alice Watson** was not so frugal with her words, "Dunst traveled the road from child actress to adult professional without a sidetrack along the way. She's so darling in **SPIDER-MAN**." Elementary, my dear Ms. Watson.

5 JENNIFER ANISTON - 2.11%

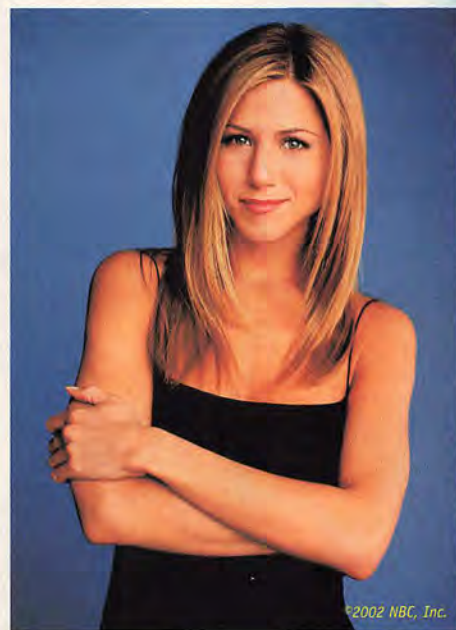
Now she's THE GOOD GIRL. For the last decade she's been one of our closest Friends and we never pass up a chance to curl up with her every Thursday night on NBC. Her beautiful image has been plastered everywhere and on everything, it seems. The world just can't get enough of **Jennifer Aniston**. And still, *Sirens of Cinema* readers believe she is underrated. If this means that you want *Sirens of Cinema* to cover and uncover more of this enchanting actress in the future, then our entire staff says "Thank you" to the voters.

Though *Friends* Rachel Green has become one of New York City's most famous fictitious residents, Jennifer actually hails from Sherman Oaks, California. Her TV résumé before *Friends* was not exactly material Emmys are culled from. Perhaps her best known roles pre-Must See TV were as the title character's sister in NBC's short-lived *Ferris Bueller* in 1990 and as the dark-tressed damsel in distress in the hilariously underrated 1993 big screen horror flop **LEPRECHAUN**. She was part of the quickly dismissed ensemble cast of Fox's 1993 bomb *The Edge*. With *Friends* debuting in 1994, we think she prefers not to look back upon that other sitcom she was in that very same year, something by the name of *Muddling Through*...which, no secret here, didn't muddle...through, that is.

With the fame and glory *Friends* has bestowed, Jennifer has set out on a varied career in films, hoping fans will have forgotten **LEPRECHAUN** by now. She's built up a cache of sweet romantic films, some soft comedy and she's been terrific in all of them. One exception, as Joanna in 1999's **OFFICE SPACE**, Aniston and the film received equal amounts of critical praise and putdown - as if low comedy can't pass a highbrow!

With the debut of **THE GOOD GIRL** (see *Sirens of Cinema* review, page 58), Jennifer's acting career is really beginning.

Sometimes it's difficult for our publisher to keep his mind on the topic at hand, when we totaled



up the votes and informed **Hugh** that Jennifer Aniston was our 5th most voted actress in the Underrated category his mind slipped, "The first thing that comes to my mind is the cover that March 1996 *Rolling Stone* where Jennifer is provocatively posed across the bed...you mean she acts too?" It's this kind of attentiveness that keeps *Sirens* out of the Pulitzer voting every year. On the other hand, we did manage to get him to sign the voucher for 3 X-Boxes for the interns' lounge.

Sensing our literary integrity slipping away, **Kevin** quickly added, "How can anybody say that Jennifer Aniston isn't getting enough press? I guess the public must like her that much. I'm not complaining. But it's not that Jennifer gets too much coverage, I think her fans are rightly upset that she doesn't get enough credit for her talent."

The votes we received led to some surprises because we didn't realize we had *Sirens of Cinema* readers in such far-flung regions. It shouldn't surprise Jennifer to know that **Sean Fernando** who marks time between Houston and Sri Lanka stated his vote, "I was born in Sri Lanka so I have seen actors of all the world and the best is Jennifer Aniston."

Paul Honda, who's close to the *Friends* home base in New York City, wants the world to know that Aniston's talent doesn't begin and end with Rachel Green. "[Jennifer] is better than just one of the friends," Paul reminded us as her was preordering his tickets for **THE GOOD GIRL**.

Sirens of Cinema has tentative plans on the table to do a career overview on Jennifer Aniston in the very near future. Stay tuned.

Underrated Actresses - The Second Group of Five

6. JULIA STILES - 1.93
7. SARAH MICHELLE GELLAR - 1.58
8. JENNIFER LOVE HEWITT - 1.54%
9. BEYONCE KNOWLES - 1.49%
10. JENNIFER ESPOSITO - 1.45%

More contest results on page 60.

ASIA ARGENTO



AN XXX INTERVIEW WITH A SCARLET DIVA

By Hugh Gallagher

Born September 20, 1975, Asia Argento (legally named Aria) is something of an oddity. Daughter of the internationally famous horror director Dario Argento and Italian actress Daria Nicolodi, a life in the arts seemed inevitable. Her acting career began in Italy at age nine where she has garnered many awards giving her star status in her home country. But with her desire to break down restrictive barriers in Italian cinema, she has currently become a hot target for vicious critical attacks in papers and magazines.

Evolving from prominent but not-blockbuster roles in her father's horror epics such as **THE STENDHAL SYNDROME** and **PHANTOM OF THE OPERA** to American films like **NEW ROSE HOTEL** (helmed by Spaniard director Abel Ferrara) and **B. MONKEY**, it would seem Asia hit the jackpot of worldwide recognition with her role as Yelena in the new hit **xxx** starring action star Vin Diesel.

But true to Asia form, as **xxx** does blockbuster business in the mainstream theater chains, yet another Asia movie is making the rounds on the smaller theater circuit, **SCARLET DIVA**. This autobiographical shot-on-video opus (which Asia wrote, directed and starred in) is the tale of Anna Battista and her battle with fame, sex, drugs and rock and roll, all shown in true "XXX" form.

Would any other Hollywood actress actively promote two movies so prominently placed on opposite sides of the spectrum?

No.

But Asia Argento is unlike any Hollywood actress... we found that out when we sat down to speak with the very candid Scarlet Diva herself.

SIRENS OF CINEMA: What is the story behind your name? Why did you change it Aria?

ASIA ARGENTO: My family always called me Asia, but, when I was born, they couldn't... there is still the same law... apparently you can't name a child after a foreign continent or country in Italy for a law that Mussolini made in '34. So my parents went to the office to put my name down and they were like, 'sorry but you can't do that.' So they thought up the name Aria, which is really good. In a way I was born to be Earth but life made me Air, as Aria means air. So I have both in me...only that "air" is like secret.

SoC: You wrote and published two books at an early age, didn't you?

AA: Two books. I wrote three and published two. One was a poetry book and the other was a short novel about Good and Evil... like in the future. It was sort of (like) **FACE OFF**, these two guys - one

was sick of being evil and the other was sick of being good so one became the other... sort of archetype. I was eight when I wrote that. The other I wrote from five to eight. I wrote another book but I lost that and never found it again.

SoC: You started acting when you were 9. You chose this to get the attention of your parents?

AA: Yes, I think so. I used to write for the same reasons. I was never the special one in my family; I was always like the black sheep. I was the one that was never smiling and, you know, a pain in the ass. So, I was always considered a pain in the ass and I wanted to do something that would make me special to their eyes. So, I thought, I tried the writing and that didn't work and I thought, let's try acting. This guy, Sergio Citti - who used to be an assistant to (Pier Paolo) Pasolini - he asked me when I was five to be in one of his movies but my parents wouldn't allow me to do that. So, when I was nine, I said I really want to do this, so they let



Asia Argento as Yelena in the big budget action flick **xxx**.



me do it. I didn't work very much and I was still considered the black sheep for many, many years after that.

SoC: Do you still think you are the black sheep?

AA: No, now I'm everybody's sweetheart!

SoC: Do you feel some of the things you choose to do today are to get attention?

AA: Yeah. It's like a... perversion. It became a perversion...a perverted way of thinking. Not that I want to shock but I definitely do things so that people can love me or hate me...but differently. They don't have to, but are forced to pay attention to me.

SoC: Do you ever do things that you don't want to do but do it anyway just because of that?

AA: When I do them I want to do them. But then I regret... full of regrets and doubts... I am not a machine. I am full of doubt afterwards. I am very active. I do things. I'm not somebody that thinks about things. I just do them and then I think about it. When I am alone I am ashamed of myself. But there is nothing that I can do... I was designed this way.

SoC: You have been in several of your father's films - how does your working relation with your father differ from your personal relation with him?

AA: Well, when we work he becomes very detached and like he draws a line. Sometimes I think in life he is scared of me. (I think) he is scared of my reactions...which are very extreme. So, when we are working he dominates me, so he is not scared of me when he is directing.

SoC: How are you treated in Italy? Do people recognize and come up to you when you go out in public?

AA: Yeah. But they are also scared of me, they think that I am crazy so that keeps them away. It is the way that you carry yourself in the world that draws the line, so people stare at me which could make me a little bit paranoid in the past, but now I know how to deal with that.

SoC: How about in the United States?

AA: They are starting to.

SoC: You've said some harsh things lately about Italy. Both you and your father are very sad about the state of things in Italy...why?

AA: It is more than sad. It is neurotic. It is sick, politically and socially. Artistically the country is fucked up. In the past I had a romantic idea of changing things - especially for women in films - but I tried to and it really didn't work. And, now, people tell me that everyday they write in the newspapers that I'm the new national hero for being number one box office out here and it's fucked up because for many years I was really the black sheep and they despised me and my work, especially as a director. I don't forgive them. I'm through with them.

SoC: *xXx* is the most mainstream film you have ever done. You have never come across as the type to do a full-blown Hollywood production. Is this a turning point in your career?

AA: I have no idea. I don't know. I chose to do this film because it felt special. Of course here they regard it as just a box office thing, but for me it was something that I had never done. So at the end of the day I got a lot out of it. It made me richer... [Laughs] Not money wise...but just with knowledge. So, I didn't have a scheme or a plan. I don't think I fit here. Like when I read the scripts now I read the lines of the character and I'm like, "How can I possibly say this line?" I can't see myself doing that.

SoC: Do you think American movies are more con-

cerned with profits rather than actual story telling?

AA: No, I don't want to think like that. I think there are movies being made here that are genuinely good and better than European movies. They go further. But I think the only freedom nowadays is to make small budget movies for the author to be free.

SoC: What do you like and dislike about shooting a big-budget Hollywood film?

AA: I like the fact that everybody was happy. They were paid well. In Europe and Italy we are always striving and everybody is unhappy and everybody just wants to go home. It feels good to have people who were troupers, loving the movie, loving making the movie. People are more spoiled, coffee tastes better and caravans are bigger. But, at the end of the day, it's about making movies. It's the same all over the world. It's about telling a story. It's not about how much money you got.

SoC: How did shooting *xXx* compare to your earlier American films such as *NEW ROSE HOTEL* and *B. MONKEY*?

AA: I can't compare it. All three movies were very different. Every movie is like a life. Every movie is different. But *xXx* was different from anything I had ever done... so was *NEW ROSE HOTEL*. It was really, really different but that was because of Abel being such a genius. I still think that. I think he taught me more than anybody about making movies. But, this too, was like going to film school with *xXx*, about keeping a huge set together. It was interesting.

SoC: Did you have a lot of trouble on *B. MONKEY*?

AA: No, no. It is long gone so... I don't care. I don't think it was excellent. I did what I could not to embarrass myself but you sometimes have learn to make a fool out of yourself.

SoC: The rumor mill claims that you've had frequent affairs with past co-stars of your films. How chummy did you and Vin Diesel get?

AA: Oh no, we didn't have an affair! They've been writing lately that I had an affair with fucking Rob Cohen and that really pisses me off because it is not true. That is really, really annoying. I don't know who started this rumor. The fact that I fucking do an interview and the journalist doesn't even ask me about that and then writes about this - me being linked to Rob Cohen! I am very picky with guys and I could never go out with Rob Cohen. What the fuck? I couldn't even go out with Vin Diesel. We are really good friends and that is it. I



Anna (Asia Argento) finds her friend Veronica (Vera Gemma) in a compromising position in *SCARLET DIVA*.



The mysterious woman, Quelou (Luce Caponegro Selen) passionately greets Anna in *SCARLET DIVA*



Asia Argento with her mentor, dad, filmmaker and *SCARLET DIVA* producer, Dario Argento.

Anna gets into some deep water during a fashion shoot in *SCARLET DIVA*.



admire him. I admire Rob, too. But I don't have a story with them.

SoC: There was a rumor in Russian tabloid that you and Vin were engaged.

AA: [Laughs] You mean like getting married?

SoC: Yeah.

AA: Holy Moly! No Vin's got other plans. Vin couldn't afford to be with someone like me and I could never afford to be with somebody like Vin. He's got a plan and I got a plan. A person like him... I don't think he needs somebody like me. I would be too much questions for him... I would force him to question himself all the time. And that's not healthy. He shouldn't think. He should do things. But, at the same time, for me, to be with somebody like him would be really destructive because if you are with an actor they force you to only think about themselves and I'd like, in my next relationship, to have something creative and be able to create something with somebody. And I don't think that is possible with an actor or a director...

SoC: You go out with musicians...

AA: Yeah, I like musicians. When I was younger I could date actors. I like photographers and I like musicians because there is an element of high clarity — when you look up at them on the stage and you feel like (they are) the daddy figure... someone you have to look up to.

SoC: It has to be someone creative?

AA: Not necessarily. It has to be somebody either as strong as me or possibly, hopefully, stronger... which is rare. I'm still looking.

SoC: I understand that *xXx 2* is already in the works. Will your character return in the 2nd film?

AA: We'll see - I'm signed for it - but you know how these things go. I'd love to do it. I'd love to see what my character does but they might kill me in the first ten minutes.

SoC: Your film *SCARLET DIVA* is also currently playing in some theaters. How do you feel people will respond to watching you in *xXx* and then watching you in *SCARLET DIVA*?

AA: I think what so great is that, with *xXx*, I get an audience that I would never get with *SCARLET DIVA* and I don't think that the same audience that sees *xXx* would be keen on seeing *SCARLET DIVA*, unless they really loved me in this - and they would have to be freaks. And (then) they would probably get *SCARLET DIVA*. But I think I'm lucky enough to have totally different audiences at the same time. The audience that goes to see *SCARLET DIVA* in a small theater in New York is probably not interested in *xXx*. The same goes for a big audience that goes see *xXx*. So it feels good. I feel like the octopus. I got my tentacles in people's heads.

SoC: I understand that all the sex scenes in *SCARLET DIVA* were real.

AA: Some of them... yeah.

SoC: What was the reasoning behind having actual sex for a scene?

AA: I think that there has been so many lies in movies... it was all about lying and not believing in anything you were doing or saying, I guess inspired at the time by the dogma, and people trying to bring the truth and kill the bourgeois of cinema... I wanted to make a statement. You have to understand where I am coming from, fucking Italy,

where movies are so fake. But it didn't change anything (there). But at least, in my life, it did change. I'm not proud of it... not something that I am proud of... but it was necessary at the time. I needed to manipulate people's lives and my own in order to get it over with. It's really weird how a movie can change people's lives and it intertwines people's lives. You're the big manipulator, the great monster behind these things going on. It is very lonely and solitary

SoC: You developed agoraphobia while you were writing *SCARLET DIVA*?

AA: Yeah, a little bit before that. I always was very solitary and I don't enjoy very much going out. Everybody thinks I'm like this party girl but really I'm not. I don't feel comfortable being in a place with a lot of people. So at the time, I had a great excuse to never go out and really become introverted and I reached a point where I was un-



Asia Argento in the 1996 *THE STENDHAL SYNDROME* directed by Dario Argento.

able to go out... didn't have a reason to go out. I was scared of going out. I was really in touch with myself. It was a very unhappy time but also very healthy. I grew up from that time. But it was so painful. My father would bring me food because I couldn't go out to get it. I used it.

SoC: How did you get over it?

AA: When the movie came out I had to start promoting it and I met Morgan, the father of my daughter Anna Lou, at a film festival. This was like the worst time in my life when *SCARLET DIVA* came out. (I was) really depressed. I even got chubby. Then I met him. He is a musician and I really loved him... I really, really loved him. I needed to love somebody. I needed somebody in my life. So I was going with him and following him to his concerts all over Italy and he was coming with me to wherever *SCARLET DIVA* was coming out in fucking Russia or wherever. We were traveling together.

SoC: Was there anything in the film that you wanted to shoot but didn't?

AA: Yeah. I'm glad that I didn't. There is a suggestion of bestiality - a woman with a dog - and my father and uncle convinced not to do that. So

I'm glad that I didn't do it.

SoC: You have stated that *SCARLET DIVA* is 100% autobiographical. What is your stance on drug use?

AA: I don't think the movie tells you that drug abuse is something to really go after. The people that are doing that are sick and it is a vehicle to test your limits. And, in the end, Anna always has a purpose and something that holds her back. She is not interested in that. She wants to live. I'm not interested in drugs. I think people that do drugs are the most boring people in the world. I got so much to do and I can't afford to lose myself.

SoC: Your father was one of the producers on *SCARLET DIVA*. Was he involved in the making of that movie?

AA: No, not really. I didn't him want to. I needed his support as a father... somebody to tell me like, "You're doing the right thing. Go ahead, don't be scared. Do it. You are on the right path." I did not need a director on the set - especially someone that I admire so much - that I could feel threatened. So I told him not to come to the movie. I would not have him. So my uncle was present as the producer and did a great job allowing me to express myself and never censoring me. But my father never did come. I showed him the film when it was fully edited.

SoC: What did he think of it?

AA: Oh, he loved it. He was very proud of it.

SoC: Are you still interested in doing a porno movie?

AA: No. Not at all. To tell you the truth I am not even interested in sex itself... I used to shock people but I don't need to do that anymore. I think of my daughter and I don't want her to be embarrassed with me when she grows. And when she goes to school I want her to be proud of me.

SoC: I have also read rumors that you have already signed a deal with someone in the United States to write and direct a movie?

AA: Yeah... I wanted to keep this secret, the next thing you know it is like on the first page of *Variety*... but I think it is bad luck to talk about your project before you do it...

SoC: You have several tattoos. You have the tattoo Anna on your rib. That was your sister? Can you tell us what happened to her?

AA: She died in a scooter accident when I was nineteen. I got that tattoo before I started shooting *SCARLET*... a friend of mine did it with like his hand... I wanted to suffer to get this. It is written with the same font that I used to write the script.

SoC: Didn't your other sister act in a film once?

AA: Yeah. I did a video for my ex-boyfriend when I was pregnant called *L'ASSENZIO* ("The Wormwood"). She was in it as an actress and also did the costumes because what she does is a clothes designer.

SoC: But she didn't pursue acting?

AA: No.

SoC: Would you want your daughter Anna Lou to be an actress or a director?

AA: No. I mean, I want her to be herself. If that is what she wants to do. I would never, ever tell her what she has to do. It is her choice. But I hope she gets her father's genes and she wants to be a great pianist.

AS SWEET AS CHERRIE... YING

If actress and model **Shu Qi** is currently the Toast of Taiwan, the fresh faced and sparkling newcomer **Cherrie Ying Choi-Yi** has to be the greatest invention from that island since sliced bread.

Okay, so maybe sliced bread didn't originate in Taiwan... and maybe we strayed a bit off the map for that analogy, but Cherrie Ying's path to Hong Kong movie stardom has been a bit of the ol' Rand McNally shuffle in itself.

Cherrie spent the first eleven years of her life in Taiwan before moving the United States, from where she graduated high school in New York. With a curious stopover north of the border to finish within a breath or two of the crown in the 1999 Miss Asian Canadian contest, you'd have to agree that Cherrie's life map didn't feature the straightest route to stardom back in China. She grew up speaking Mandarin, came to America and polished up her English and now she's cracking the big time in an industry whose prominent tongue is Cantonese.

She first caught our eye with a standout performance as an ill-fated Interpol agent in **Andy Lau's** over-the-top obsessed assassin thriller **FULLTIME KILLER**, where her English speaking performance was soothingly bathed with a lush bi-continental accent. A friend had recommended her for the screen test and she confidently slid her foot inside the door to fame. For a first time performer in front of the camera, Cherrie more than held her own in her many scenes with her on-screen partner, Hong Kong stalwart **Simon Yam**.

Immediately flashing a hint of her wide acting range, Cherrie quickly turned up next as a heart-warming prostitute taking dancing lessons from - yep, him again - **Andy Lau** in the light-hearted holiday romp **DANCE OF A DREAM**. Though buried under the heavyweight credits of stars **Sandra Ng** and **Anita Mui**, it was impossible to miss the twinkle in Cherrie's eye and the broad-faced smile that seemed to put out the welcome mat to everyone in the audience. She even had a chance to show off a surprisingly strong singing voice joining in the show-stopping tune roughly translated as "Walking with our Dads." Sung to the tune of the classic pop hit "Never on a Sunday," Ying's voice was in strong company with megastar **Mui** and pop star **Lau** and she wavered not one tiny bit.

Big-time Hong Kong director **Johnnie To** (of **HEROIC TRIO**

story and interview by **Kevin Collins**

fame) kept Cherrie in mind when he set out to cast his Chinese New Year 2002 offering, **FAT CHOI SPIRIT**. Actually, he remembered Cherrie after singing sensation **Cecilia Cheung** was hospitalized after a nasty stunt accident. The stunt was unrelated to **FAT CHOI SPIRIT** but Cecilia had already been cast and a character was crafted specifically for her. In stepped Ying in true Hollywood fashion.

This wasn't one of those classic sinister understudy stories by any means. "I visited Cecilia at the hospital on that day," Cherrie remembers, "and at the time I had no idea [about this film]. Later, when I saw Cecilia, she grabbed my hand and said to me, 'It's all up to you now, make it great for me!'"

Did she think Cheung was serious at first, asking Cherrie to take her place?

"No way!" Ying insists. "[But] then, days later, when production began, I learned that Cecilia really was the one who made the suggestion and Johnnie To agreed."

The rewrite was a little more intense than initially expected. With her superstar status in the billing, Cheung was naturally expected to play opposite **Andy Lau** as his love interest. Fetching and talented as she may be, Cherrie was still hadn't earned the box-office thunder to equal Cecilia. So, when push came to shove and script came to shooting, Cherrie was relegated, so to speak, to being paired with **Louis Koo** (who plays Lau's prudent but naive younger brother). Cherrie understood, unsurprisingly, but was still a bit disappointed - but not because of being downgraded from star to support but because she missed out on the chance to play directly with Lau.

"When I was still a kid I really liked Andy Lau. He really enjoys his work and he takes good care of everyone around him. I admire him a lot." But beyond the disappointment, Cherrie's appreciation for Hong Kong's current top male icon is truly heartfelt. "I'm lucky, that's for sure. Andy has always taken care of new talent and he gave me plenty of chances...especially during the promotion of **DANCE OF A DREAM**. So

Andy's not only my idol, he's my benefactor."

The film was a box-office success in Hong Kong earlier this year and gave Cherrie a chance to put her comedic talents on unbridled display. "In **DANCE OF A DREAM** I played an escort and I couldn't go as far as I wanted to. In [**FAT CHOI SPIRIT**] I got the chance to go all out." And it showed. Cherrie is hilarious in her bittersweet role as a streetwise Mahjong hustler with the proverbial heart of gold. Apparently, at least according to director To, the traditional game of Mahjong - or MJ as it's popularly known - takes to the streets of Hong Kong these days pretty much like Three Card Monty did to the 42nd Street of yore.

Now, on the threshold of stardom, Cherrie might be forgiven if she set her eyes forward on future success and conveniently forgot how she got this far. But Cherrie is far too gracious and will have none of that...she knows that her good luck came at the expense of a good friend and colleague. "As a newcomer, I'm naturally thrilled to get a leading role but I know I got this opportunity only because Cecilia Cheung got hurt. Any time I think about that I get a little unhappy. Besides, Cecilia's acting is great and it wasn't easy to step in for her...the pressure was really great."

With the summer doldrums weighing in on American cinematic shores, it's extremely tempting to give in to Cherrie's two most recent outings. And, if you do, you'll find the results are highly satisfying. In **VISIBLE SECRET II**, she's has the role of her young lifetime as an old chum of hot new Hong Kong throb **Eason Chan**, coming to visit him and his new bride just shortly after their wedding...and too late after a mysterious plane crash. Instead of delivering birthday greetings to Chan, Cherrie's character now has a more important spiritual role to play. Cherrie's against-type portrayal of the cute but curious September will send shivers up and down your spine...and you won't even know it's happening. Chan, who's been in over a half-dozen films himself in the last year told the press on hand at the film's premiere that this is the one film that has made the deepest impression on him. He mused, "I really like this film because it shows that love won't die even if a person dies." The film



opened on June 17th – just 3 days before Cherrie's 19th birthday. At the **VISIBLE SECRET II** premiere Cherrie let it slip that she was hoping to receive a car as her birthday gift. Only hitch, she doesn't have her driver's license yet. Driving without a license in Hong Kong can be almost as scary as seeing ghosts.

And what's the use of having a good scare if you can't laugh about it afterwards? When June 20th rolled around, Cherrie was celebrating her big day on the set of Johnnie To's **MY LEFT EYE SEES GHOSTS**. Starring Cantonese super-chanteuse **Sammi Cheng**, Cherrie's on board in a dewy-eyed comedy featuring droll ghosts on the loose with a heartfelt love story on the side. The screenplay seems to poke equal fun at director Ann Hui's original **VISIBLE SECRET** as well as at the newly minted American icon **SIXTH SENSE**. **MY LEFT EYE SEES GHOSTS** proves the modern adage that as long as you can see dead people, you can always see a profit...in this case, currently to the tune of over HK \$20 million.

With films such as **MIGHTY BABY** just being released to white hot box office results – HK \$13.03 million in its first 10 days and dropping **AUSTIN POWERS IN GOLDMEMBER** to a distant 3rd in the middle of a stifling hot August – and **THE WALL** making its way into theaters now, Cherrie is a force to contend with at the Hong Kong cinemas. And with her beatific smile shining up from glossy magazine pages and down from billboards all over Asia, it's more than a safe bet that Cherrie Ying will be the new breakout star on the Eastern horizon.

Heck, she's just another success story from the sidewalks of New York...

Sirens of Cinema: You were a bit of a globetrotter when you were young, weren't you?

Cherrie Ying: I was born in Taiwan and then I finished kindergarten and first grade in New York. But I was staying on my own with my aunt so I decided to go back to Taiwan and study there with my parents. After 7th grade, my whole family and I emigrated to New York once again...till now!

SoC: Is your family still close?

CY: I think I am a lucky person. Through my entire life my parents have always been there for me



Poised for action in **FULLTIME KILLER**.



劉德華 梅艷芳 吳君如 領銜主演 劉偉強 導演
夢見你
Dance of a Dream
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whenever I needed them. Even now, when I am living on my own in Hong Kong, my parents are still there for me 24/7. Because of that, I feel like the luckiest child on Earth! [Laughs]

SoC: Your English is excellent in **FULLTIME KILLER**...

CY: My first language is Mandarin, actually, then English.

SoC: Do you speak any other languages?

CY: I'm still learning my Cantonese and I think it's a very difficult language to learn. But I'm trying really hard to get rid of the Taiwanese accent when I speak Cantonese for my career. Other than that, I really want to learn Japanese now. I think, for me, learning languages is quite fun. So I'll like to learn as many as possible while I'm still young. You know, people pick up languages faster when they're still young.

SoC: Yes, it's the old unpainted canvas situation where it's easier to create and learn when the mind is still young and fresh. Was your first attraction to the movies when you were young?

CY: I never thought I would be in the entertainment industry. I always thought that I would just go to college and get an ordinary job like all my friends from school. It was a coincidence to be in the industry and starting to shoot movies. But seriously, after I shot my first movie, **FULLTIME KILLER**, that's when I started to like acting in front of cameras. Now I just enjoy it so much. I enjoy performing.

SoC: Okay, tell us a little bit about **FULLTIME KILLER**. It was like one fantastic audition and the job was yours! What was it like to hobnob with Andy Lau and Simon Yam in your first film?

CY: I was so surprised when I knew I was going to be in part of that movie. And Andy Lau is my all-time favorite artist since I was a little kid. I was shocked, literally. Then I found out that Simon Yam would play my partner in **FULLTIME KILLER** (and) everything was just so exciting. I really don't know how I got the role. But I had met the director a few times before shooting it so I guess he just thought I was suitable for that role.

SoC: Next you were in **DANCE OF A DREAM** – did this role come directly because of your work on **FULLTIME KILLER**?

CY: After working with Andy Lau from **FULLTIME KILLER**, he instantly invited me to be in part of **DANCE OF A DREAM**. The movie was from his company, Teamwork Motion Pictures. Although I'm not the main character in that movie, my performance helped me gain my reputation in the Hong Kong movie industry. Now that...I was surprised!

SoC: You also got a chance to work with the legendary Sandra Ng and Anita Mui in **DANCE OF A DREAM**...

CY: Working with Sandra Ng actually was a wonderful experience! I've always admired how free she can be in front of the camera since she's one of the top actresses in Hong Kong. Not only is she a well-known comedian, even when she plays serious characters she is an excellent actress. Working with the two of them is like learning stuff every second. By the time the movie was finished, I truly learned a lot of stuff that has been really helpful!

SoC: Then you were on to **FAT CHOI SPIRIT**...that's 3 films in a row with Andy Lau... You had a much larger role in this film than in **DANCE OF A DREAM** so I suppose you could say that this was your first real comic performance.

CY: The director of this movie – Johnnie To Kei-Fung – who is the same director of **FULLTIME KILLER** used me again for this movie. And this time I played a larger role than ever. Yes, it was my first leading role for a comedy. But while I was shooting it, I was under a lot of pressure because the role was (created) for Cecilia Cheung, but she got into an accident and she was in the hospital for weeks. Then they decided to use me within two days right before the movie started shooting. Therefore, when I got the role, I was saying to myself that people are obviously going to compare me to Cecilia in a certain way. Because of that, I was working even twice as hard as I usually would. And, besides, I was also shooting **VISIBLE SECRET II** at the same time as **FAT CHOI**

SPIRIT.

SoC: **VISIBLE SECRET II** and **FAT CHOI SPIRIT** are miles apart in terms of attitude and atmosphere. Do you prefer comedy to drama or horror?

CY: I've played roles in both comedy and drama, by now. It's even harder to make people laugh than to make them cry. I personally like watching comedy movies, so I guess playing roles that can make people laugh is more interesting for me.

SoC: In the spirit of **FAT CHOI SPIRIT**, do you play Mahjong?

CY: Yes, I do [Laughs]...unfortunately! I started learning it while I was in 8th grade. My parents used to be against letting me learn MJ because it is gambling. Then they realized it is a cultural icon for us Chinese. (It turned out that) my friends taught me MJ before my parents did. So now I play MJ for Chinese New Year and in my leisure time with family members.

SoC: I have to admit that the game totally confuses me... Are you any good at it?

CY: I don't play it too well, honestly...I do have luck though! [Laughs]

SoC: Nothing beats good fortune! You show off such a beautiful singing voice in **DANCE OF A DREAM** and you have an amazing haunting *a cappella* solo in **VISIBLE SECRET II**. Do you have any aspirations to become a singing star like many other Hong Kong idols?

CY: Being a singer? I think I want to focus more on my movies first. Besides, I'm working on my next movie which is my first leading actress role in a drama. It's with Louis Koo. It will be shooting in China for a month or so. Right now I really don't have that much time to think about dropping an album or anything. I wasn't born with a nice voice. I don't have the talent for singing. So even if I do plan to sing, I'll make sure it'll come out decent and not just fooling around trying to be an "idol".

SoC: I guess we'll have to disagree on the timbre of your voice because I think it is beautiful...speaking of **VISIBLE SECRET II**, this

must have been a big step for you in your career? **CY:** **VISIBLE SECRET II** is the first time for me playing a large role in a movie. It's the first time starring in a drama, indeed. The director, Kwong Man Wai, gave me a lot of self-confidence before shooting...a lot of encouragement for the movie. During the shoot, he also gave me lots of advice. It was my first time being so close with a director and to experience the relationship between actors and the director. He would tell me what he wanted from me for the role and he accepted my opinions about playing the role. The movie came out in late June and the box office was not shabby!

SoC: **VISIBLE SECRET** and **VISIBLE SECRET II** don't really seem to have much in common other than the possible concept of ghosts... Is there any connection that we should know about?

CY: There's no connection between the first and second. It's a totally different movie...just the same crew members and some actors.

SoC: You're barely 19 years old but, with **VISIBLE SECRET II**, you've already worked with a broad range of Hong Kong's leading men: Eason Chan, Andy Lau, Louis Koo, and so on. What's it like to have co-starred with so many top-of-the-line actors? Have you studied them for any hints or lessons?

CY: Of course! They all helped me by working with them. Experience working and having relationships with different actors in the movies is something I can't learn just by going to acting classes or anything. The real experiences on set and how to handle working with them surely will help me in my future career. Most of the time I even became good friends with them after working with them. For instance, Andy Lau is more like a big brother to me now. Even though I'm not shooting anything with him, we still hang out and chill. Like I said, he's been my idol since I was a little girl - just like lots of people. Right now he's not only my co-worker but also a friend. He's one of the people I have to thank since the first day I became an actress.

Take, Eason Chan for instance, I had so much fun



TOP: Koo as a cucumber with co-star Louis Koo.
Middle: Visible celebrities - with Jo Kuk at **VISIBLE SECRET II** premiere.
Bottom: The dream cast of **DANCE OF A DREAM**.



when we shot **VISIBLE SECRET II**. We're both hyper on the set, both talkative, and energetic. There wasn't even one moment while we were shooting that was boring. We always had fun waiting for the lights or anything. He's got so much talent as a singer. He even taught me how to sing. As you can see, I sang a little part in the movie and he was practicing with me on the set with a guitar. He's also a really natural actor... no acting, just being himself.

Jordan Chan, too. He's so natural while acting that it feels like there are no cameras and people surrounding you. There's so much to learn from them, and I'm still absorbing all the experiences.

SoC: How about the superlative actresses you've worked with, Anita Mui, Sandra Ng, etc. Any lessons learned?

CY: Same thing! Sometimes on the set, when we're not shooting, I would ask them questions about acting skills. They are so generous and will tell

you their experiences in movies and offer their advice for my performance. For that, I thank them.

SoC: What is going on with **WALL IN WALL OUT** with Jordan Chan? Has that finished production yet? What can you tell us about the story?

CY: That movie is just out. Now it's called **THE WALL**. It was a small budget movie.

SoC: What film projects do you have planned for the near future?

CY: I've just finished **MY LEFT EYE SEES GHOSTS** – that's just come out – and **MIGHTY BABY**. And they both came out recently now, showing in the theatres in Hong Kong. My next movie will be shooting in Beijing with Louis Koo and the director is Jingle Ma, who is famous for many hits especially now for **THE GOD OF COOKERY** with Stephen Chow and **PARA PARA SAKURA** with Cecilia Cheung.

SoC: What are your general feelings about the Hong Kong movie and music industries and how well or poorly does it compare to US or other countries' products?

CY: [Laughs] You can't compare them to the Hollywood movies. Hollywood probably has the preparation for the movies for months or years in advance. We only have days. Not only that, sometimes we shoot movies without scripts. And what does that mean? They write it while shooting the film! That really affects the performances for actors because sometimes we don't even know what we're shooting... "Why am I acting like this" or "What's the next scene going to be like?"

SoC: Do you have any secrets about Cherrie Ying that you want to spill?

CY: Secrets? [Laughs] I don't know... But I'm a really outgoing person – unlike my appearances in the movies. I've never tried to be the next "whoever" and I don't want to be whoever. I just like being myself in front of the audience and just like performing. I'm not doing the job because of the money or for the fame. I'm doing it because I like performing and I think this is something I can have a future at. I'm doing my best now in every movies, every scene, and at every possible opportunity. I thank my family, friends, and fans, whoever that's there to support me. I will do my best. Trust me!

SoC: And your best is certainly shining through clearly. So that's the secret behind Cherrie Ying...what's in her future?

CY: I've shot seven movies within the last year, now. That's a record for new artists in Hong Kong...a record since years ago. I have to admit that I'm really lucky. A lot of people helped me to get through difficulties. And I am lucky enough of having the chances to perform. In the future, I will put my heart in my movies first. If any other opportunities come along – such as singing – I still will put acting first before anything. My goal is to be a successful actress and to support my family. I hope that sooner or later I can buy my parents a dream house in California. Of course, I want them to be proud for what I'm doing!

SoC: They should be proud. And we're all thankful for all the entertainment you've already given to us and for the promise of more to come.

papers, hopping vampires and cloyingly comical visitors from that other realm. And yet, a few classics – **A CHINESE GHOST STORY** and **ROUGE** (both 1987) are good examples – have made their marks on those viewers brave enough to dip their dainty toes into whatever the River Styx is called on the other side of the Bamboo Curtain.

Why aren't most Chinese horror films more enjoyable for the rest of us? One theory holds that since Chinese culture has an almost inherent acceptance of ghosts and supernatural visitations, that the inclusion of ghosts and the supernatural does not necessarily turn a story with ghosts into what we perceive as a "ghost story." Ghosts can be characters in some Chinese films in much the same way as a milkman can be in an American film. Skip to the summation: a ghost story from China doesn't necessarily see horror as it's final destination. A Westerner tuning in might be in for disappointment.

In 2001, director Ann Hui delivered **VISIBLE SECRET** as story about a woman who can see ghosts with her left eye. Instead of exploring the typical traditional Chinese specters and goblins, Hui and company deployed a generous helping of modern Hollywood horror techniques and, as a result, **VISIBLE SECRET** was a mini-hit and a tense little shocker that has its fair share of Western en-

thusiasts. Traditional ghosts met up with high gloss special effects and a mosh pit full of enough gore to satisfy even the most craven teenager.

Seeking to create a cottage industry – if in name only – Hui gets bumped upstairs to producer and Abe Kwong takes the director's chair for **VISIBLE SECRET II**.

Though the ties to the original are tenuous at best, this curio of a sequel packs plenty of punch and manages to chill your spine with shuddering suspense rather than to crack it in half by making you jump ten feet out of your chair with shocks and effects.

Jack and Ching have just married and are settling into a new apartment. When Jack runs out to buy some condoms one amorous night, he winds up being struck by a hit-and-run driver and is left for dead, sprawled on the pavement. Jack lingers in a coma with Ching bravely by his side. He finally pulls through and is soon on his feet with the help of crutches. Jack believes that he and Ching are destined for a long happy life together because whenever he becomes wistful he looks ahead and is sure he sees his beloved in every frame of his future.

But soon an inexplicable complication sets in...whenever Jack sneezes



Name: **Cherrie Ying Choi-Yi**
(aka **Cherrie Yin** or **Cherrie In**)
Mandarin: **Ting Wen**
Cantonese: **Ding Man**
English name: **Cherrie**
Birthday: **June 20, 1983**
Birth place: **Taiwan**
Star Advertising Model for: **32 Degrees Celsius, Sunflower, Mona Lisa**
Favorite Movies: **YOU'VE GOT MAIL, SHREK**
Favorite Singers: **Britney Spears, Eminem**
Hobbies: **Singing, dancing, websurfing and chatting.**
Official Website: **Cherrie Ying Online**
(<http://www.dirty-pop.net/~cying/>)
Official Webmistress: **E'tienne Townsend**

Filmography:
FULLTIME KILLER (2000)
DANCE OF A DREAM (2001)
FAT CHOI SPIRIT (2002)
VISIBLE SECRET II (2002)
MY LEFT EYE SEES GHOSTS (2002)
MIGHTY BABY (2002)
THE WALL aka WALL IN WALL OUT (2002)

Sirens of Cinema highly recommends Cherrie Ying Online – the official site maintained by E'tienne Townsend. An official "We Love Cherrie" fan club is soon to be announced.

Peter Lau in Hong Kong contributed research to this article.

he sees visions of a ghastly death scene, a woman in old-fashioned clothes splattered on a bloody pavement. To make matters worse, Jack starts to experience a bit of uneasiness around the new apartment: strange sounds, flickering lights, reflections that don't exactly reflect and Ching gazing glassy-eyed and shuffling spookily around the place. When Ching promises Jack that she'll hire an expert to find the truth, he's expecting someone with credentials in exorcism. Instead, Ching brings Jack to a shrink. But Jack's not crazy.

Deflated by his wife's lack of faith in him, Jack's spirits get a boost when his old gal pal – he calls her his "god sister" – September, arrives in Hong Kong from London. She believes Jack's tales of the supernatural and she enlists to help him spy on Ching, hoping to explain her weird behavior.

Curiosity is never a safe endeavor
(Continued on page 45)



VISIBLE SECRET II – directed by Abe Kwong. Starring Eason Chan, Jo Kuk and Cherrie Ying. Media Asia Films (BVI) Limited. 98 minutes.

The Chinese ghost story genre is generously laden with tradition and religious beliefs and plenty of outright superstition. The genre has been around for thousands of years and will likely last beyond the day entertainment of any kind goes out of vogue. Much to the dismay of most American viewers, movies about Chinese ghost stories are typically so generously laden with traditions, beliefs and superstitions that are so beyond their understanding that the entertainment value is lost in sea of floating prayer

Guns, Girls & Gasoline: Fastlane Speeds Into Primetime

By Scott Barker

Some 25 years ago, the quintessential Southern California rock band The Eagles sang about "life in the fast lane". Their ode to the excitement and danger of parties, drugs and expensive living would be a fitting theme song for Fox's new show (premiering Sept. 18th) the work of McG (director of high concept music videos and **CHARLIE'S ANGELS**) and John McNamara (writer of the short-lived TV update of *The Fugitive*). The show has all the elements of an Eagle's tune: So. Cal. style, slick cars, fragile relationships and hot women.

The storyline is a cinematic pastiche of various TV and film projects. Like *Miami Vice*, it involves undercover cops who use seized property to create the illusion that they are players. In a nod to *The Mod Squad*, there are three of them - one white, one black, one female. And the action is straight out of **THE FAST AND THE FURIOUS**, with pricey cars being raced and wrecked.

In the pilot, we learn that Van Ray (played by Peter Facinelli who played Takmet in **THE SCORPION KING** and who is husband to 90210 dream queen Jennie Garth) has just lost his partner in an undercover deal gone sour. As he tracks the killer, he reluctantly hooks up with Deacon Hayes (actor/comedian/MTV star Bill Bellamy), a New York City cop who was the brother of Ray's late sidekick. The patter between the two will remind you of the first **LETHAL WEAPON**, with lines like, "If you want to play mystical Negro, I'll buy you the robe." Their knockdown "getting-to-know-you" fight is straight out of **48 HOURS**.

The two form an uneasy alliance, cemented together by Billie Chambers (the heart-stoppingly gorgeous Tiffani Thiessen), a whatever-works-style police officer who heads up the unit to which Ray and Hayes are assigned.

It was Billie's idea to create the "Candy Store," a warehouse/headquarters filled with everything from diamonds and Rolexes to a vintage GTO and racing bikes. "Everything we seize we keep," she tells Ray and Hayes. "Everything we keep we use." She offers Ray the chance to go deep undercover (as Van Strummer, like The Clash's Joe Strummer, one of many musical references that crop in the production) in an effort to trap his partner's killer. He agrees to join the untied crime-fighting program, as does Hayes.

From the word go, the show doesn't lack for cheap thrills. The pilot opens with Ray being felt up by a hot blonde who fences high-priced stolen property. Not only is the fence searching "happyland" for a hidden microphone, she's holding a gun to the hero's head while he drives a Ford GT 40 (actually, more likely a replica) at a dizzying speed.

Much later in the episode, this same cop and criminal get their freak on, in a steamy scene that stops just short of frontal nudity. Damn! I guess we'll have to track down the European export version, or wait for the DVD to see more.

But those expecting Thiessen, who actually has bared her lovely body in the magazines *Veronica* and *New Look*, to doff her top in this show may be disappointed. Her character is all business, sort of like the part Andrea Parker played in *Pretender* (although not so adversarial). She dresses austere and shows none of the sunny or flirty sides she displayed to such effect on *Saved by the Bell* or *Beverly Hills 90210*. It's worth overlooking the 5'5" actress's curvy frame and getting past those gem-colored eyes to note that she has some serious acting chops, however. The Long Beach native recently starred in the well-reviewed Indie drama **IVANSXTC**, about a self-destructive Hollywood agent. She can be tough (she was a firefighter for a number of episodes of *Two Guys and a Girl*); funny (as in Woody Allen's latest farce about a blind director **HOLLYWOOD ENDING** or the slapsticky **SHRIEK IF YOU KNOW WHAT I DID LAST FRIDAY THE 13TH**); or movingly dramatic (as she was playing an embittered single mom on the under-rated series *Cupid*).

In *Fastlane*, she nicely underplays her role, understanding that keeping her movements small and her voice somewhat hushed will draw viewers into listen and observe more intently. She can deliver simple exposition with flair, or sneak up and hammer you with a major revelation (as she does when her character reveals that she knows what it's like to kick heroin). Understanding that in real-life she suffered a cruel blow several years back when her boyfriend, actor David Strickland, hanged himself in a Las Vegas motel room, makes you appreciate all the more her willingness to tackle a part in which her character is battling her inner demons.

Between Thiessen's smoldering presence, cameos by

(Continued on page 61)

BIRDS OF PREY

Ashley Scott

Dina Meyer

Rachel Skarsten

Birdwatching: The WB's New Series is a Real Chick Flick

By Scott Barker

*Dark and angst-ridden, the based-on-a-comic-book **Birds of Prey** has little in common with the more kid-friendly likes of summer blockbuster **SPIDER-MAN**. Still, this amped-up new WB series may prove to be the perfect fall show for fans of gorgeous women, high-kicking action, and clever bon mots.*

"There's something going on in this city after the sun goes down. I intend to find out what it is," intones Detective Jake Reese (**Shemar Moore**) as he surveys a confusing crime scene in the heart of New Gotham City.

He's right to be concerned, of course. There's a lot happening that would befuddle, amaze and terrify the citizens of that venerable metropolis if they only knew.

For starters, seven years earlier, Selina Kyle, better known as Catwoman, was stabbed to death in front of her daughter, Helena, the offspring of a relationship with the mysterious Bruce Wayne. The killer, a clown-faced man called The Joker, also paid a visit to Barbara "Batgirl" Gordon, busting a cap on her and leaving her a paraplegic. While all this was taking place, in another city a young girl named Dinah awoke from a nightmare, certain that she has just witnessed the death of one woman and the wounding of another.

Even if you've never read the comic book on which *Birds of Prey* is based, it won't be difficult for you to figure out what happens next. A now-teenaged Dinah journeys to New Gotham to find the woman whose shooting she dreamed about years before, only to discover that Barbara is a wheelchair-using crime-fighter (known as Oracle), aided in her exploits by Selina's grown-up daughter.

The strengths of *Birds of Prey*, along with the challenges it faces, are revealed in the first few minutes of the pilot. On the plus side, it moves swiftly, easily relaying pages of exposition without breaking the flow of its action-oriented story. It also looks great - dark and claustrophobic, yet enlivened by comic-book-bright flashes of color. The cast is confident and very appealing, led by Sci-Fi veteran **Dina Meyer** as Barbara/Batgirl/Oracle, and including relative newcomers **Ashley Scott** as Helena/Huntress and **Rachel Skarsten** as Dinah.

What may hamper the success of the program is the fact that, unlikely the somewhat similar *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* - which had no ancestors other than a campy film that few people saw - everyone is familiar with the story of Batman, either through the comic book, the '60s TV series, or the movie franchise. The viewers of *Birds of Prey* bring certain expectations to the table, which may eliminate the less open-minded. It also will have to endeavor mightily to keep from becoming formulaic: Dinah dreams about a crime, Barbara researches it on the computer, and Helena takes care of the actual butt-kicking duties.

The show's creators have tackled such dilemmas before. Executive Producers **Mike Tollin** and **Brian Robbins** are the creative force behind the WB's *Smallville*, a reinterpretation of the Superman legend. Writer **Laeta Kalogridis** transformed a popular video game into the film version of *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider*, worked on the Showtime series *The Hunger*, and the final film in the **SCREAM** trilogy.

Some of the actresses involved in the project are likewise familiar with being in the line of fire, while others are just beginning to make a name for themselves. Ashley Scott was Gigolo Jane in the love-it-or-hate-it Spielberg adaptation of Stanley Kubrick's **AI: ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE**. She also had a recurring role in the superhero series *Dark Angel*. Canadian Rachel Skarsten is the junior of the bunch at only 17, but a veteran of several kid's shows,

and the horror flick **FEAR OF THE DARK**.

Dina Meyer, soon to be 34, is the most experienced of the three actresses. She's no stranger to the worlds of fantasy, sci-fi, or action, having starred in **JOHNNY MNEMONIC**, **DRAGONHEART**, **STARSHIP TROOPERS** and the soon-to-be-released **STAR TREK: NEMESIS**, where she reportedly gets in touch with her villainous Romulan side. With her hair a reddish brown, she looks a little like a cross between **Geena Davis** and **Michelle Pfeiffer**, and it's her beauty, combined with her athletic skills (we see Batgirl kicking butt in fantasy and flashback sequences), and ability to project a bookish quality (in real life Meyer is a self-professed cybergeek who studied for the role on-line) that make her perfect for the part.

Ashley Scott, only 25, also has got what it takes to become a breakout star. First of all, she has an amazing face, with full lips and haunting eyes that can go from seductive to serial killer in a flash. When you see her strut in her Huntress outfit (which in the original pilot looked like a Vivienne Westwood interpretation of a superhero attending a Goth rave), you're immediately aware that she has extensive modeling experience. Her limber fighting form (with plenty of crouching stances that resemble animal forms of Chinese Wu-Shu) is clear evidence of her gymnastics and martial arts training. Her speech occasionally betrays the soft twang of her Louisiana roots (which is just fine for those of us who believe that if it weren't for Southern women the world would be a boring and unbearable place.) She embodies a sort of dominatrix-like sex appeal. When she says to a villain she's just sent scurrying, "I hate a man with no endurance," you can easily believe that he'd try to change for her.

Balancing out the trio, Rachel Skarsten possesses the infectious earnestness of the senior class president and the cool blonde beauty of a teen magazine cover girl. Her job on *Birds* is to skew the demographics slightly for younger viewers. For the screenwriters, she represents the character who can change the most dramatically. Initially turned away by the crimefighters ("Sorry, we don't have an opening for a junior supergirl," snipes Helena), they soon come to realize that she can handle herself. How far her meta-human powers of precognition will develop is no doubt going to be a major part of the storyline for the run of the show.

The series, slated to premiere on Oct. 9, has generated a lot of for-and-against comments at websites such as canarynoir.com (dedicated to the *Birds of Prey* comic book) and gothamclocktower.com. Much of the initial discussion has swirled around the show's title (which, since none of the heroes are using an avian name doesn't make much sense) and the recasting of the part of the main villain, originally played by *Twin Peaks* alum **Sherilyn Fenn**. In fairness, Black Canary (Dinah's alter ego in the comic book) isn't exactly a name for a raptor anyway, and **Mia Sara**, who stepped into the über-bad-guy role vacated by Fenn, is a very talented and likeable actress (what guy didn't fall in love with her in **FERRIS BUELLER'S DAY OFF?**) Besides which, her real-life father-in-law is Sean Connery, so she is super hero royalty, of a sort.

It remains to be seen if this show takes flight or lays an egg with audiences, but the WB has a feel for nurturing unusual actioners, so it's a pretty safe bet that this "Bird" will have a nest for a while.

THE STAITE OF FIREFLY JEWEL SPARKLES IN SCI-FI SERIES

By Scott Barker

Four hundred years in the future, a transport ship rockets through space, carrying a band of unlikely warriors protecting the life of a young woman with special powers. Welcome to the world of Firefly, a Fox TV series that has more buzz than a hive of killer bees.

"Serenity" ... the name of the heroes' spaceship in *Firefly*, Joss Whedon's latest TV series, is undoubtedly intended to be ironic. Fans of his work (especially the irony-laden *Angel*) understand that nothing remains tranquil in the worlds he creates.

If you've followed the adventures of Buffy Summers and her friends for any length of time, you know there are three elements that add up to producer/writer/director Whedon's signature style: quirky, pop-culture humor; thrilling action set-to's; and stunningly attractive performers.

Judging by the previews of *Firefly*, it will follow true to form, with throwaway lines that fans will recite to each other in Humanities class; scenes of daring-do that will keep on-set medics occupied patching actors up; and a group of seriously talented and devastatingly magnetic performers who will soon be plastered on bedroom walls and computer screens nationwide.

One of those performers is **Jewel Staite**, briefly seen in TV series like *Higher Ground* and *Space Cases* (as well as the *X-Files* episode "Oubliette", where **David Duchovny** had to give her mouth-to-mouth!). Here, the witty, 5'6", brunette beauty is given a chance to spread her wings as Kaylee, the mechanic on board *Serenity*. Our Scott Barker caught up with Jewel Staite, one of its hot young stars for an enlightening Q & A.

Sirens of Cinema: You were born in Canada but you spent some of your early years in the United States, right?

Jewel Staite: I spent four years of my early life in Maui. I started acting at age six [and] was basically home-schooled for high school. Luckily, I've been working ever since.

SoC: Growing up, what did you want to be?

JS: Depending on what age? When I was six I wanted to be a teacher. When I was eight, a veterinarian. Nine, a talk show host. Eleven, a writer. Twelve, very tall and naturally blonde. Fourteen, the greatest movie star that ever lived. Fifteen, the next Aretha Franklin. When I was sixteen I realized I was going to be an actor or an actress, whatever. Maybe I knew that all along. Maybe I should just play a combination teacher, vet, and supermodel.

SoC: How did you begin acting?

JS: I was very young and I loved performing. At my friends' birthday parties I would put on plays and sometimes, if they were lucky, I would belly dance. My parents realized I wouldn't shut up until I started exuding some of this creativity elsewhere, so they put me in acting classes. I was recommended an agent, and ever since then I've been acting away.

SoC: What has been your favorite role (other than Kaylee) so far?

JS: "Teddy" in a film called **CHEATERS**, which never really came out. That was two years ago. Maybe it'll be out on video soon or something. Teddy was insane and very smart, and that combination can be a lot of fun. Also, while filming **CHEATERS**, I was in a very happy time of my life, falling in love. It was summer, lots of parties. It holds good memories for me.

SoC: Tell us a little about the storyline for *Firefly*?

JS: It's a sci-fi western/pioneer/pirate/Robin Hood show. It's basically about a group of people pretty much confined on a space ship, trying to get along and learn from each other. The characters are very, very diverse, which usually makes for an interesting show. I am very, very proud of it. I think it's brilliant.

SoC: How would you describe your character? What do you have in common with her?

JS: Kaylee is energetic, optimistic, hopeful, charming, as nice as can be, and genuinely a loyal and honest person. Nobody has any beef with her. You can't not like her! Plus, she's really smart and can fix an engine like nobody's business. She's the mechanic and engineer of the ship, always running around with grease on her face and a dirty jumpsuit, giggling and breathy in an

unannoying way. I think part of her would really, really dig being a girly-girl. She's the type of girl to jump at the chance to wear a dress, put her hair up, develop a new crush, that kind of thing. As far as what I have in common with her... I guess at times I can be energetic. And more than some would say I'm a girly-girl. I like lip gloss, pretty dresses, romance. But I've never touched an engine that isn't a prop in my whole entire life. **SoC:** What's it like working with Joss?

JS: Joss is a wizard. He is the type of person that can successfully do five things at once. He is a fabulous director, very thorough, knows what he wants, gets things done, gives precise direction but is always open to new suggestions and ideas, and he's fast, which is always nice. He's a wonderful writer, one of the most creative people I've ever worked with, if not the most. And he's a great guy, very real, very genuine. And [he's] hilarious!

SoC: There have been a number of space exploration series over the years. What distinguishes this show from, say, the *Star Trek* franchise?

JS: First off, no aliens. Our ship isn't as nice as theirs. No lasers - real guns with real bullets. And we ride horses and speak Chinese. *Firefly* is really so different from anything that's ever been on TV. It's a combination of about five different themes, which I think (and I'm hoping) that's why it will do well. It's so hard to describe that all I can say is you have to watch it to know what I'm talking about.

SoC: Aside from memorable characters and compelling drama, a good science fiction series needs something that gets a "Wow!" from the audience. What does *Firefly* have that elicits that reaction?

JS: It's not just a science fiction series. It's sci-fi with horses and bar fights, guns and prostitutes.

SoC: What has been the hardest thing about working on the show so far?

JS: Memorizing the techno-babble. Last week they gave me a speech about engines that made no sense to me whatsoever. And I had to say it really frustrated and angry and really fast. And it was so difficult because it was about one in the morning and I had too much caffeine in my system so I kept jumbling up the words together. It was terrible. But that's it, so far. Everything else is still very new and very exciting.

SoC: What have you enjoyed the most about your role?

JS: Bringing home Kaylee's sunny attitude. **SoC:** Many performers have other artistic talents that they seldom get to show off on screen. What's yours?

JS: I sing R&B and jazz. I think I'm not such a bad writer, either.

SoC: What do you think will most surprise viewers about the show?

JS: It's nothing anyone's ever experienced.

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INSIDE THE MINDS INSIDE THE BOX...

A COUPLE OF NEW YORKERS HAVE THEIR OWN ARTISTIC RESPONSE TO THE TERRORISTS
- an interview with Michael Burlingame and Caroline Cho by Kevin Collins

In these times of trouble and strife, reasonable-minded men and women look on in anguish and disbelief at every new report of terror and murder in the world around us. If only reason could seem to find its way into the hare-brains of some filmmakers around this shaken world.

At the recent Toronto International Film Festival the red carpet was rolled out for a gala premiere of a collection of short films entitled "11'09'01" - a project sponsored by Vivendi-Universal. A chunk of the material in this collection actually attempts to defend the terrorism against America. That only makes it more difficult to stomach the knowledge that the premiere was sponsored in part by American conglomerate Viacom through its subsidiaries Paramount Pictures, Showtime and Canadian Famous Players theaters.

Actor and active hempster **Woody Harrelson** has gone on the record to say that America's military response to the murderous sneak attacks of September 11, 2001 is itself "terrorism."

In New York, Pennsylvania and Washington, DC that day, over 3000 lives were cowardly snuffed out. The lives of the rest of us have been changed forever.

As Americans and as lovers of everything creative about the film making process, we hold no quarrel with anyone having the right to differing opinions or with anyone using the film medium to express those opinions. What has been disappointing, though, is the fallow reaction to the events of September 11th and its aftermath in the form of motion picture discourse.

We are grateful that **Sigourney Weaver** and **Anthony LaPaglia** have combined forces to give us the inspiring **THE GUYS** - a drama about a New York City Fire Captain preparing the eulogies for his men killed in the collapse of the Twin Towers. We are hopeful - and sure - that there are more films of **THE GUYS** ilk out there...no need to flood the market, mind you, just let the voices of democracy and inherent decency be heard every once in a while.

But a voice has been out there in the wilderness since early in 2002 in the form of a made for peanuts short film. We've discovered a quirky little low-budget production called **INSIDE THE BOX** which, in its own peculiar roundabout and frenetic way, tells the story of one life affected by that fateful day - and does it by wryly combining humor, farce, enemy propaganda, nudity, a mouse and a birthday cake.

Director **Michael Burlingame** - a transplanted New York by way of Boston - has created an uneven but enlightening 40-minute short, starring American-Korean beauty **Caroline Cho**, that seems to start out by highlighting everything that is wrong with America. Naturally, corporate America is a good place to start whenever someone wants to knock the Red, White and Blue. And knock at it Burlingame,

SoC: Michael, after you arrived on the New York scene from Boston, you have a long list of credits in projects with many of the superstars of the music business...how did those come about and how much creative input did you have in any of those?

MB: When I came to New York in 1990 I fell in with Sting's people. Part of his management company was here in New York. I sort of fell into the office scene there and they were trying to have a video production division. I was always there. I was using their equipment. I was working on a script at the time, so I was doing printouts and photocopies and just whatever I could do. And they asked me if would go out and shoot something for Sting one time when he was playing at Jones Beach and they didn't have anyone to do this little tiny thing which was going to be like 40 seconds. So I went and did it for free. They liked it and they asked me to do something else. So eventually I managed to establish a rapport, in a sense, with Sting - as far as you can with someone like him or anyone else who's kind of like a star - where I would go on the road with him or just shadow him all the time and just be with him constantly filming. He either had a specific project where they wanted to show behind the scenes with Sting or they were just generally amassing archives. So I spent months and months traveling Europe, Asia and America. I was like the guy who shows you what Sting does. Which isn't always a lot, really. I shot a lot of chess games. [Laughs]

SoC: Now, Caroline, you also seem well schooled in your craft. It's obvious that you've had your eyes on the theatrical prize from Day One, if not with acting then with dance - or both. As a child did you know that you had this natural talent for movement or was this a skill that you chose and then honed?

CC: Yeah, I did. My mom and dad always told me that since I was two years old I would be dancing in the mall with people crowded in front of me. So I guess I always did have that kind of a talent.

I was born in Atlanta, Georgia and I moved to Korea when I was five years old and I came back when I was sixteen. So I was really young... [Laughs] I was in dia-

Cho and company do. In a colorful palette of images, McDonalds, Tide, Nabisco and just about any corporate icon you can think of is set up to take its very funny fall. **INSIDE THE BOX** doesn't tell a story so much as it lives on. **Andy Warhol** would be delighted.

And then, just as the farce seems to get on a roll - about when Cho's Korean immigrant character is talked into sitting bare-bottomed on a birthday cake for \$20 (obviously by some rich imperial American dog) - the film collides with the agony of that horrible morning one year ago. If you were laughing one minute ago - as many of us might have been on that day - you're sucker-punched to the gut in one inexplicable and indefensible tick of the clock. That's what happened in real life. That's what Burlingame does to his film.

Burlingame and Cho, along with a couple of other cuties, had been shooting their "America from the outside in" farce for many months before last September. The film chronicles, in its own surreal way, the progress of their shoot. When America was attacked and thousands were dying and shedding their blood, the project was put to bed as the production took time to mourn and reflect. When Burlingame resumed shooting, he decided that his chronicle would go on and it would reflect reality - in its own abstract way. To explain more would be to give away the power of the film's punch. Suffice it to say, you're not going to find **INSIDE THE BOX** on your local K-Mart shelves any time soon. There are plenty of powers that be who do not want you to see this little film. A few attempts to market a DVD have been squashed after pressure was brought by outside influences against the DVD producers.

The film is stridently anti-terrorism and anti-Al Qaeda, though many in its audiences seem to think it's just the opposite. In the end, those very same icons of Americana knocked in the earlier portions of the film have risen up and wave the flag in glory and triumph. But, because the film's voice is so abstract and hard to grasp, you might just think you're watching one of those **Osama bin Laden** propaganda tapes brought to life by CNN.

But will you get to see **INSIDE THE BOX**? It's only been shown publicly twice and audience reaction was strong - sometimes nearly violent. This coming October 6th and 8th it will be shown again at The Rafael Film Center during San Francisco's Mill Valley Film Festival, (check out <http://www.mvff.com> for details). When this reporter first saw the film at a New York screening, the gasp of disquieted audience was palpable. It's a reaction that is sure to be repeated by Americans everywhere whenever they see this film. When the lights come back up and when reality sinks back in...you just might be waving the flag too...while keeping an eye out for a pesky mouse or two.

pers, actually. I always liked to perform in front of people. In elementary school I always danced and in school concerts and I would sing or dance or do something.

SoC: When you were in Korea between the ages of 5 and 16, did you do any performing or anything creative there?

CC: Yeah, I had to decide when I was in 6th Grade if I should sing, play the piano or dance. And my mom and dad gave me a choice and I decided to go to an Arts school. I went to Yaewon Arts Middle School and Seoul Yaego - which means Seoul Arts High School - as a dance major.

SoC: Your path to stardom has had some cheerleaders along the way, people who have seen the talent within you, most notably in terms of scholarships... that's obviously been a positive for you, hasn't it?

CC: Yeah, it was. I got a scholarship to the Vienna Dance Festival in '99 and it was the first time that I went to Europe and got a chance to see the world and meet people. And I want to do that more.

SoC: How did that scholarship come about?

CC: One of my dance schoolteachers told me about it so I went and applied for it. I got my recommendations and everything. I got a sponsor from Unesco and they sponsored me through the whole trip.

I had to send three recommendations, a small portfolio and send an essay to them. They chose only 50 people out of the whole world. So I was lucky to get chosen.

SoC: That's how you get a dance scholarship? By writing an essay?

CC: Yeah, I guess so...

SoC: Maybe I should apply for one of those...

CC: [Laughs] Yeah... well, every scholarship has their



own way of judging the contestants. I think the essay was a big portion in their judgment in this case. The essay was about why I wanted to get into the festival, whose workshop I was interested in and what I wanted to learn the most out of it. They look at your whole background and everything, with your résumé...

SoC: Now that you're based here in New York...Is there an "independent dance scene" going on in New York...a world parallel on some level to the independent movie scene?

CC: Yeah, there's a lot of dancing going on. Technically people say there's an "uptown" and a "downtown" dance scene. Uptown is much more known to people because it's much bigger productions, like Alvin Ailey's and The New York City Ballet... those are the really known companies. But the downtown scene is more unknown and more it's underground and you can see performances at Dixon's Place or The Kitchen or P.S. 122 and University Settlement, and places like that. And it's much more abstract and more modern, I guess, and theatrical.

SoC: Much more abstract leads us right back to Michael's directing style...A lot of your work seems to be painted with the thick brush of the absurd and disconnected. Do you prefer the abstract to straightforward storytelling?

MB: I guess, I don't know. I enjoy working in a stream of consciousness way. I'm not saying it's easy to write a script where some guy goes from Point A to B and something happens. To make that dramatic and to work and to make sense in a narrative way is difficult. What I do, to do it well – to make it entertaining and compelling to watch – is a challenge too. I guess I like the idea of abstract or video art or art films but I always found them to be very boring so I wanted to try and find a way to explore them with my own inner vibe as a way to tell a story...if there is a story. It's fun to write that way.

SoC: Caroline, In the couple of dance performances that I have seen you in – "Seung Moo '1'" and "When Do You Think You'll Grow Up?" – you were the featured performer. Have you reached a point of notoriety, in New York at least, where you're sought after for a lot of these roles or are you still working the audition trail?

CC: I still take parts wherever I can. I would like to work also in Europe...as a dancer, not as a choreographer. I think I have a lot more to learn. Meanwhile I want to explore some of my own things, I think. That's why I'm starting to do solo right now.

SoC: Do you do your own choreography?

CC: Yes, I do. All of those that you just mentioned I choreographed myself.

SoC: Have you ever done choreography for anyone else?

CC: I am slowly starting to do it. I did it once in college but not more than that. So, I'm exploring my choreography world right now.

SoC: Do you see your future in the business leaning more to the dance area or towards acting?

CC: Yeah, it was actually unexpected to be in a film...or to kind of be an actress. Yeah, it was actually a coincidence that I got to work with Michael. And it's a pleasure to be with him and to work with him. Yeah, I just strictly wanted to be a dancer or a choreographer but it just fell through like this and I'm happy.

SoC: Michael, since your stories require a minimum of linear acting, how did you go about choosing Caroline as your lead actress? Basically since there's more imagery than storytelling...

MB: Right. There's little interaction between characters so that kind of limits the idea of acting, as we know it. Caroline is essentially the only character in this film. We met and I was working with her. I saw this little video that she had done...It was almost like a home video. It was her and her friend and they were doing this thing with pillows in a bedroom and they were sort of just improvising...

SoC: Sounds interesting...

CC: [Laughs]

MB: Yeah...[long pause] I'm losing track of what I was going to say...

SoC: That's understandable...you're talking about two girls playing with pillows in the bedroom. I kind of lost track of my question too...

CC: [Laughs]

MB: Oh, right...Okay... the reason why I wanted to work with Caroline... It started out so casually, you know? I was like, "Why don't you just come over and we'll shoot something and we'll see where it will go."

Everything was just done in the most casual way at first. But I thought that we had a really good rapport together, that we were going to be able to explore stuff. So after that was done I wanted to work together (with her) again and we just sort of built upon it. It started out with nothing, really, and then it started building and building and becoming more of a complicated structure. I don't think a lot of people would be as open and confident to do that as Caroline was. She's very beautiful, too, and that doesn't hurt. I think she's very talented in many ways. It worked out great, I think.

CC: Thanks! [Laughs]

SoC: Do you have that same natural talent for acting as you do for dancing?

CC: Oh, my God. It was a requirement in college that I had to take acting courses for two semesters. It was horrible. That was my worst fear, actually, because my language barrier was the biggest thing. I was afraid to speak in English and try to be perfect while at the same time putting in emotions and everything. I couldn't do it that well. It was kind of scary. After I graduated I decided to overcome that fear and I went to HB Studio to take a couple of classes. And I realized that all you have to do is just be natural instead of trying to work so hard. So that's how I started to get into it a little more.

SoC: That language barrier was because your natural language had become Korean by that time?

CC: It was Korean. Now it's much better but even in college I felt like it was difficult to explain myself in English perfectly. My pronunciation was great because I was born here and I was used to speaking English but my grammar and everything was at the same level as Korean people speaking conversational...so it was even more weird for me.

SoC: So when you think, do you think in English or Korean?

CC: Both...it crosses in my mind, both languages. [Laughs]

SoC: I guess this brings us to *INSIDE THE BOX*. When did you start shooting?

CC: Around January of 2001...

SoC: Even though you were shooting without a script or a plan at the beginning, there must have been some point where you decided that the concept was going to be your rant against corporate America.

MB: Ultimately it got to that point...I thought it would be kind of fun to do something that's sort of making fun of a documentary about an artist or a dancer or anybody...the kind of thing that you always see on PBS or the other kinds of serious programs about the Arts, where they make art and culture so dry and so embarrassing in so many ways. You know, you watch those kinds of programs where people talk about their work. I thought it would be cool to make fun of that and start with Caroline talking about her dancing – when she dances, how she thinks and what she's feeling.

But the other thing is that she had to speak like she was right off the boat, that she couldn't really speak English well at all. She had to go back to that and that was good acting.

I saw it as a way to kind of use broken English to get into something that was absurd and surreal. But it somehow feels like it makes sense. It all started out



as a parody in a way of a documentary of the Arts. "When I'm making a pot and my hands are in the clay, I feel like I'm reaching back to my ancestors..." Those kinds of things that people say when they're really only musing up the clay. That was really the idea...

SoC: Was there a script at this point?

MB: After we shot it I wrote the narration for it... I kind of reacted to what Caroline had done, visually. But we really shot it in order, as you see it on the screen. It was pretty much shot in it sequence. Most films aren't done that way, of course. So you see some of the development. Around August of 2001 we were sitting around and talking about how it should end. And I remember saying that I felt it had a very strong ending where this mouse gets killed and all this stuff happens. This mouse is really tied in with a lot of the victimization things that happen to her. But it's all in fun; it's not to be taken seriously. I thought it would be good to later just jump into the future and see what happens a few years down the road. Maybe she speaks perfect English... "Yeah, now I am an executive at this big company...and thanks for watching the show!" Or something like that.

And then a few days after September 11th, I just felt like that was the way to end it, to draw her into that. When I used to show that part (of the film) on its own to people they'd ask, "Why is this Asian woman playing the part of an Al Qaeda member? It doesn't make sense." Well, she just sort of fell into it. It's something that happened. You know you're in New York in this film from almost the beginning.

SoC: Were you more inclined to do *INSIDE THE BOX* because it didn't have a script and you didn't have to learn lines and act in the generally accepted sense of the word?

CC: I don't think it would have made a lot of difference. Well, it started out, like Michael said, as a dance improv. And I was working with him and he gave me a lot of ideas and I was working with that. If there

were more lines involved, it still would have been fine. I don't think I would have had a lot of trouble with it. In a way, with my past and with the video together, it has a connection to me personally, I think, a connection between the character and myself. I would have felt comfortable with it.

SoC: The character in the film, her feelings and thoughts about America and its capitalism... are these similar to your feelings, or your family's feelings seeing America from a Korean perspective?

CC: Yeah, kind of. But I don't mean literally...

SoC: For instance, sitting bare-bottomed in a birthday cake...would your real parents react the same way as you say your parents in the film would?

CC: Oh! [Laughs] That's a totally different conversation...a different subject. Would they be pissed off...is that what you asking me?

SoC: We'll discuss that totally different conversation in a minute! But would Koreans in general take a dim view of sitting in a birthday cake as a typical example of American wastefulness of something like that?

CC: Yeah, in a way, sure.

MB: I think it's sort of an international taboo, sitting naked on a birthday cake.

SoC: Maybe it's an American thing...you're from Boston...do you remember that Sparky Lyle used to do that all the time?

MB: Oh, yeah, the baseball player. I remember him.

CC: Actually, in Korea they don't have anything like that...sitting in a birthday cake...especially with a bare butt! [Laughs] No!

SoC: So, where did that idea come from to use in the movie?

MB: I remember hearing about a fetish where guys like to watch women smoke cigarettes. They make videos about it. They're wearing clothes...there's nothing really sexual about it except for the fact that these guys get off on the sensuality of the smoke and the ritual. I wanted to try to invent a fetish. I was thinking of an idea for a short film set in a café where a waiter puts something down and a really well-dressed woman accidentally sits down on an éclair and it's a turning point in her life because it's so traumatic and she becomes obsessed with sitting on pastries and cakes. It becomes a real compulsion. But instead I thought it would be humorous to just throw one cake into this film and have Caroline sit on it and just be done with it.

CC: Thanks! [Laughs]

SoC: Okay, well, I'm not going to let Caroline get away because she started to laugh and told us that it would be a whole different story with her parents and her sitting naked on that birthday cake...

CC: Oh, no! [Laughs] Oh, I was just saying... well, my parents didn't see the film yet, so I think they would be kind of surprised by that, because it's a pretty shocking thing I guess, sitting on a cake with my bare butt. That was the idea.

SoC: This ties in with a situation we've had at Sirens of Cinema. Over a few issues we ran some kind of sexy pictures – not nudes or anything – and we received letters and e-mails from readers, especially Asian and female readers, who took us to task for being unnecessarily exploitative. We are

always looking to promote actresses and female entertainers on their own chosen terms. We never look to offend. But, not being Asian or female, we need to be enlightened...Enlighten us...

CC: I really don't think it was a problem. I don't know why people reacted that way. I don't feel that way at all. Maybe, in a way, Asian people felt like the magazine was invading their space. Because they're not really exposed to that too much in public, I guess. Nudity is still kind of an enclosed thing. People are not exposed to Asian eroticism within themselves yet and they still think that people view them sexually not artistically. So I think that's why people went, "Wow" or were shocked by it. But I don't think there was a reason to be pissed off about it. I don't know if it was females, in general. Or males...but they'd have to be happy with it, right?

Because it's natural to see non-Asians in a sexual way or using nudity, I guess. But the only Asians you'll see doing nudity is kind of like in a porno magazine. There's not many Asian Playboy models yet.

But I wanted to say that my parents actually saw Sirens of Cinema and they really like it. I was asking them if I should do this or not or what do they think about me being in the magazine. They were happy about it. They said, "It's really good exposure. We like the magazine." I asked them if it was too sexual to you if you were a viewer seeing the magazine and they said it was totally cool. They saw nothing wrong with it.

SoC: With that in mind, did you have any problems with the little bits of nudity in INSIDE THE BOX?

CC: At the beginning, sometimes I was kind of pissed at Michael...

SoC: Was this your first time being nude on film?

CC: Yes! Actually it was. I had a problem at the beginning because I had some bad experiences in the past. A couple of photographers had approached me and they wanted me to do something I was not comfortable with. It wasn't art. It was pornography. I lost a little bit of trust after that but I think I have overcome it...big time! I felt like it would help my dancing career as well if I were more open-minded. And if I can do this when I'm young, that's cool. I can't do it when I'm older, you know. ...Yeah, that was my idea!

SoC: I hate to use the word "coincidence" in connection with the terrible atrocities inflicted on September 11th, but something within those horrible attacks caused you to make a connection with the short film you were working on...because this film was obviously not going in that direction on September 10th, 2001.

MB: Yeah, true...Just, every day, even now almost a year later, in New York you can't turn on the TV without hearing about September 11th. I think people in the rest of the country don't experience those constant reminders about it. It's like, "Today they finished searching for remains [at the landfill] in Fresh Kills." At that time, of course, we were all just inundated with it. I wanted to react to it somehow.

In retrospect, certain people saw the film in its entirety and they said, "This is a beautiful film but you ruined it. About half way through it you just ruined the film. You made this other film that was really horrible in a certain way." And some people were really pissed off about it.

SoC: You do understand where they are coming from, don't you? The September 11th section packs a wholly different wallop to it than the more obvious satire that is in the first part of the film. It seems as though that section is a totally foreign element dropped into the film...

MB: Yeah, but there were 19 foreign elements that dropped into New York that day and they just sort of changed everything and stopped everything in its tracks. And I didn't really think of it at the time but after, people complained to me, that was how I explained it after I thought about it. I said, "Maybe I did ruin the film." They said, "You should separate it and make two films. It would be much better." I said, "Maybe it would be better in one way but maybe I don't mind ruining this first part of the film because that was a day that a lot of things got ruined in a lot of different ways.

SoC: How soon after September 11th did you decide that this would be added to your film?

MB: Probably about 3 or 4 months later...probably a little before Christmas. That's sort of the way I looked at it. Even if it's jarring, it should be. I saw a lot of stuff on television a few months later that everyone saw, documentaries showing the horror of that day and I thought they're not offending the people who did this. These shows had us reacting by saying "How horrible this is and how sad and look at what these people did." But to someone who sympathizes – and there are plenty of people in New York who do, who were happy with what happened that day – it's like watching the Super Bowl and saying, "This is really great stuff." I mean the people who were pro-Taliban or anti-American.

There's plenty of ways to speak out in a legitimate way about being anti-American, of course; but it's an occasion for them to see the bodies dropping and to see all of this stuff for real again. So I wanted to do something that was very offensive to the intent of that day. So I just sort of slammed it into the film.

SoC: Caroline, were you aware of Michael's intention to change the course of the film at that point?

CC: I guess we talked about it. [We] wanted to dedicate something to the public and this was a way that we thought that we could least do it. Just make our little film, I guess, and dedicate it to the people, Americans, who were saddened by the whole event.

SoC: Looking back at the finished product, do either of you have any problems – or even general uneasiness – about the references to September 11, 2001 in INSIDE THE BOX?



MB: Sometimes I waver in my commitment to it, especially when it's shown publicly. It's only been shown publicly twice. It's difficult because I don't know how people are reacting to it. It's difficult because it seems (as though people feel) it mocks the memories of the people that died as well as it attacks and blasphemizes this pseudo-religion behind the attacks. The Taliban thing... And I wanted to eroticize it, too, for that reason. "Tali-Booty" – that was an early working title. It's really a blasphemy of a blasphemy because their motivation and their credo is so false. It's the real gutter religion. Maybe Farrakhan was right, but he had the wrong religion, you know. Or maybe all religions are gutter religions because they're all a good way to justify killing people for what they believe in.

Yeah, that's the one thing that makes me worry. After we had a showing at Void in SoHo (in Manhattan), someone who was a roommate of a friend of mine told me if he didn't know who I was and if he found out where I was, he would probably come over and try to take a swing at me. He said, "I didn't know who was making this film, it seemed like it was someone they found in Afghanistan, you know, along with all the other manuals." But it was based on one of their manuals.

SoC: You say that you are mocking or attacking the people who attacked America... Do you feel that you got your point across...like to that guy who wanted to take a swing at you?

MB: Maybe. But he said, "You better be careful where you show this. You really should watch your step." And this was after I explained it to him. So I said, "You know, I thought maybe I would go out on a limb with this." And he said, "Well, you did...so you should be careful." But I don't know if I agree with him.

SoC: I know when I sat and watched the film the first time, I felt as though I was watching this quirky little parody with beautiful women dancing around corporate logos and making cracks about America's capitalism; but it stopped being funny at the point of the September 11th footage. When that section of the film came on I felt as though the director had stepped into this comedy that I was watching and just punched me in the stomach. But I gave the film the benefit of the doubt and I kept watching and, after some thought, it was all pretty apparent in the end that this certainly was mocking the Taliban and Al Qaeda with all of the music, dancing, nudity and women freely expressing their opinions. You are requiring the audience to pay attention.

MB: Yeah, it's not spoon-feeding it to them. Everything I have seen or read about the events of that day has been spoon fed to me. Even people who say, "Oh, no, you've got to think about whether there was some justification because of American policies or this or that..." Everything has been carefully couched in different ways. Whereas I just sort of threw something out there like that.

For example, [some of the narration] is a text that was found in the luggage of Mohammed Atta, who flew one of the planes in from Boston. It said to prepare yourselves spiritually, mentally and physically for the acts of that day, to dress in a certain way, to think in a certain way when you step on the airplane, and all this kind of stuff. I just thought it would be nice to have this read, to set it to music and to illustrate it in kind of an abstract way. They're talking about, for example, the beautiful virgins who will be waiting for them in paradise, dressed in the most beautiful clothing. And in the film we have Caroline there, all wrapped up and cutting her way out of the *burka* with a box cutter...and tearing at it. You know, I think this alone shows that this doesn't have any value, this credo.

CC: First of all, I was in the film so I didn't have a chance to watch it from the outside until I saw it at Arlene Grocery (Theatre). That was the second time I saw it. The fourth time I saw it I kind of got the point that it was kind of funny in a way. It took me four times to see the film and actually digest everything and just look at everything carefully to get where

Michael was coming from. Actually, when I saw it for only the second time, I felt like I was scared that I was going to be threatened by somebody. Because I felt like I was being seen as part of the Taliban. So I had mixed feelings about it. By the fourth time, everything came together in my mind.

SoC: So that means that when you were shooting it, you weren't really totally on board with Michael's concept?

CC: I think I personally was just into what we were doing at that time. Thinking about the 9/11 attacks and what we were going to do. So when everything was put together it was a different story.

SoC: Yeah, but there's a long scene where your character is playing with a toy airplane in her mouth. How did you think something like that was going to fit in?

CC: Well, I didn't think about it that way. I didn't think that I was part of the Taliban. I was on the American side and I was trying to [make fun of] what the Taliban were doing. That's how I was actually acting or portraying myself as in the film. But, looking at that as a viewer, I felt totally different, the opposite way...I felt I was part of the Taliban and I was kind of scared looking at it. In that way I was kind of threatened by people who gave Michael phone calls and kind of said scary things.

SoC: Have you gotten many threatening reactions like that?

MB: I aired some stuff on public access when the film was in progress... This is sort of off the subject but there were people who were upset about the mouse and the mousetrap. They called and kind of offered vague threats to me.

SoC: Man, with all the stuff about America being attacked, any somebody's main concern is a mouse?

MB: I don't know, because these people are really pretty nutty, you know. I think guy [who threatened me] is probably trying to figure out how many mice died on September 11th instead of worrying about people. Some of these people out there are like that. This guy wanted to put me in a giant mousetrap. He said so.

SoC: Now there's another film for you!

MB: Yeah. [Laughs] But if could just say one thing about what Caroline was saying about that... Say putting the airplane in her mouth...I could make a film using footage that I could buy from CNN showing the airplanes going into the building and illustrate how horrible that was or I could use their words against them – which was my intent – and show in a different way just how horrible that was. Because she has this little airplane in her mouth and it always reminds me of a preying mantis eating a bug, the way she takes it in with her tongue and then starts swallowing. You can see her throat constricting a little bit. It's just another way to express the horror in a way that any on-the-ball Al Qaeda guy would say, "That's an insult! That's an insult to everything that I stand for!"

SoC: Do either of you think the political implications that might be inferred by the film will have any negative impact upon its success?

MB: I don't know. I don't think it's going to be on cable anyway. It's just a little art film... You had an Arabic voice talking, representing their credo... and I wanted to present America in a way that very neatly symbolized those things that they thought made us infidels. And I thought a good way to do it would be to draw upon pop art: to use the kind of images that Warhol and some of his successors used, a celebration of packaging and of products, kind of kitschy in a way, and to have a nude involved in it. I thought that was a good way to represent America because it's great. I mean the packaging is great...a woman works

nice.

At the same time it's sort of corrupt to them. It's capitalistic. It's globalistic. It's dirty...in *INSIDE THE BOX* there's a strong sense of parody, there's political content. While McDonald's might not think it's fair [to show their logo in the film], it might be "fair use. And there's I-don't-know-how-many millions of tons of McDonald's packaging that litters the streets of America everyday. McDonalds actually made a statement saying, "Well, yeah, but it's the customers who throw it there. It's not us." Which is true, no matter how you might react to that. But they're throwing their logos around like they're worthless. They're putting them on garbage in the first place, so I figured it would be okay.

SoC: Did you ever try going the other way? Suggesting that the McDonald's fries and the Tide box might be product placement and that they should pay you?

MB: You know, you never know. These guys probably have product placement in their home movies.

SoC: I'm curious...my first contact with *INSIDE THE BOX* came from a short article by V.A. Musetto about Caroline in the New York Post. Though the article discussed Caroline and the infamous "sitting in the cake" sequence, it made no reference at all to the September 11th elements.

MB: I don't know...at one time it was going to be an anti-New York Post film...

CC: Oh, no! [Laughs]

MB: But he knew it was good copy...the girl in the birthday cake angle...the Post knows good copy. And I do want to add that I did learn about that fetish later. I had seen it on TV. I'm not saying that I invented it...girls smearing cake on themselves.

CC: I didn't like it.

SoC: No?

CC: No. It was a weird feeling. I took a shower right afterwards.

SoC: Did he let you at least get to pick what kind of cake it was going to be?

CC: It was a sponge cake, I think...

MB: ...with vanilla frosting.

CC: We got to eat one piece actually...

MB: Before! [Laughs]

SoC: Ah, so I see you knew what my next question was going to be! But since we're on the subject of the birthday cake, does your family know what they're in for when they do see the film?

CC: They want to see it. Yeah, I told them about everything and my dad said, "I want to see the film...but what do you mean 'naked'?" And my mom's like, "Oh, come on, it's art." I'm going to show it to them some day. I think they're going to like it.





SoC: Did they have any preconceived notions about it?

CC: No. I didn't even tell them about it until Michael won an award.

SoC: So they didn't even know that you were working on it?

CC: No. I mean I told my parents that I was working on a film and that it was experimental. But they didn't know that there was nudity involved.

SoC: Because of their Korean heritage or do you think that your parents will react any differently than average American parents... or is that just a general parental thing?

CC: No. Like I said, I've had some past experiences. They're both artists so they're pretty much open to nudity. And they're pretty open-minded people so I don't think they'll have any problem with that.

MB: They were the first hippies in Korea.

CC: [Laughs] Yeah.

SoC: At this point in your careers, having put in a lot of work and being on the brink of earning a living at it professionally, do you look back and say that you had some role models whom you looked up to?

CC: I usually don't have any role models because I think that everybody is different. I have a choreographer that I look up to...Pina Bausch. She's from Germany and she's very theatrical in what she's doing. There's another person who is in Belgium. His name is Jan Faber, and I worked with him in Vienna. I learned a lot from him...that's the first time I was nude, actually, on stage. That was in 1999. So those two people have the most influence on me.

MB: I admire Buster Keaton and Charlie Chaplin a lot. When I was younger that stuff meant a lot to me and it

inspired me. Frank Sinatra. Picasso. The Beatles. Jimi Hendrix. Fellini. Bergman. When I was a kid I used to watch PBS a lot. They'd show a lot of foreign films, old films, Bergman-type films. Some of them were kind of sexy. I was pretty young and I saw a naked girl in one of them so I just kept watching, waiting for the next naked girl to come along. She never came but, at the same time, I got involved in that type of filmmaking. I saw it for completely prurient reason but after a while I forgot about all that and became devoted to it. And I do like Truffaut too. But a lot of what inspires me is from painting, in general, or listening to music.

SoC: Which brings us back to imagery and the reason why many of your films don't have a straightforward storyline.

MB: Yeah. *INSIDE THE BOX* is kind of a series of tableaux. It's like here's a lot of paintings that have some movement in them - still lifes that move - and they stack up in a certain way until you have a cumulative effect where you feel like you got somewhere and you got something but you weren't given everything along the way. In the end, it all adds up. ... Like at the end of *INSIDE THE BOX* when Caroline and this other girl dance in sort of a celebratory way for Americana...with all the products we have.

SoC: When you cast your films with women who have to perform in scenes that might have some strong political controversy or maybe include nudity or something that some might deem questionable. Do you look to hire actresses who will fit to your needs or do you try to work with the actresses' concerns?

MB: No, I think I'm pretty sensitive to that. Like with Caroline, I didn't really spring anything on her. We talked about everything and things progressed. Like, if on the day we met, if I asked her to sit on a cake and, even if I told her why...

CC: I would have said no.

MB: But we got to that point where I felt it was okay to ask her about that and to do it. I always want it to be that the context is understood by everyone involved as much as possible, at least as much as I know it. Sometimes I didn't know. But I always try to make my motives clear...if I'm sure.

SoC: If you come to a scene that you want to shoot - feel you need to shoot - but the actress is hesitant, does push come to shove one way or the other? For example, if Caroline really was uncomfortable about doing the cake scene, what is your recourse...recasting, dropping the sequence, coercing her to do it?

MB: I probably would have dropped the idea. It couldn't be recast. Really, just about anything that's in that film I would have dropped if Caroline didn't want to do it or for some other reason...because no one thing was very important to me. I thought there were plenty of things there; that you could pull out a couple of pieces and it would still stick together. The cake, in the end, wound up being sort of a centerpiece in a way. But, no, I wouldn't try to pressure her because I know that doesn't really work. Though I could have just pushed her into the cake...or just tripped her!

SoC: Sure, just wait for her to be walking around with her pants down and just sneak up on her!

CC: [Laughs]

SoC: Caroline, when you have second thoughts about doing something in a film, is it a matter of it being something that you don't want to do, something you're not comfortable doing, or is it that it might be something you don't want people seeing you do?

CC: In the beginning I was kind of afraid of "What if?" What if I become kind of famous and everybody knows me. But, it's like I said, you can do this only when you're young. I think. And keep it just as it is and then...show it to your children later on! I think I wasn't really worried about it. But it's not like I just did because someone forced me to do it. I did it on my own and I had feelings behind it and there was a reason behind why I did it. So I think I'm totally fine with it. If it was a porno, let's say, and there was no

reason to do it, to just be naked, I wouldn't have done it. So I think it's fine. I'm not worried about it.

I thought about it right before I did this. I thought about it over and over again. In a way it was rehabilitation to me. Like I said before, I wanted to overcome my fear. It may sound corny but it's the start of a new life.

SoC: Is it easier to do this edgy stuff on film or on stage?

CC: Oh, boy. I think on stage is easier for me for some reason because I am actually expressing myself and not a character. I think everything is about sexuality nowadays...like in commercials...and there's so many beautiful people walking around. If people look at it the wrong way, it's just their opinion.

SoC: *INSIDE THE BOX* as an entity...is it going to take you two somewhere? Is it a steppingstone in your careers?

MB: I think we'll work together again. We'll probably do another film.

SoC: Will the film help to propel your careers?

MB: It's really hard to say. It hasn't been seen by anyone yet. I've entered it in a lot of film festivals but it's too early to say whether they're going to take it or whether it will have any impact. A short film doesn't really change things much or get a lot of attention. Sometimes it does. There are certain exceptions to that.

There's very little market for short films. It's not worth the effort for me to try to get distribution.

But, for Caroline and me working together, that will happen again. For me, out of everything I've done, I'm most satisfied with this. I'm very happy with this.

CC: Yeah, in my dancing career too, I think Michael's helped me a lot. I use video projectors in the background when I'm dancing and in my last production he helped out with some music. In the future I think I'm going to work some more with Michael too.

SoC: Michael, do you see yourself as just directing on your own or are you open to being hired to direct someone else's project?

MB: I do a lot of commercial work...for music television mostly. Sure I'm definitely open to doing any kind of stuff. If someone has an idea for a film I'll get involved. I help other people with their films. Shoot for people. Help them direct. Anything. I have plenty of free time.

SoC: Caroline, are you going to pursue acting?

CC: Oh, we'll see. I don't know. I just got done with my dance performance - "When Do You Think You'll Grow Up" at Dance Space on Broadway - we'll see where it's going to go.



Birthday: December 3rd.
Sagittarius - Year of the Dragon
Birthplace: Atlanta, Georgia
Height: 5'6"
Weight: Just right
Eye color: dark brown
Hobby: Pet sitting, fishing
Favorite City: New York
Favorite Movies: UNUSUAL SUSPECTS, SPANISH PRISONER, AMELIE, CHOCOLAT
Worst Habit: Play with my hair a lot when I'm nervous and put it in my ear.



CURTAIN CALLS

María Félix

When actress María Félix died on April 8th, her passing was scarcely noted by the mainstream Hollywood press. Perhaps this was because the talented and accomplished actress shunned tinsel town for the silver screens of Mexico and Europe and became a legend throughout those parts of the world on a level equal to the best of Hollywood. Surely, she was often described as a Mexican Monroe. In searching for the right words to best send Félix off into that Heavenly Hall of Fame, we found that no one said it all any better than New York Daily News columnist Albor Ruiz.

Mexican Legend Led Life of Beauty

by Albor Ruiz

María Félix, woman of beauty and strength, died in her sleep at her Mexico City home — on her 88th birthday.

The daughter of a Mexican Indian father and Spanish mother, she was an international figure and a proud symbol of her *mestizo* nation and culture.

"She is so beautiful that it hurts," said French film director Jean Cocteau of Félix, the most famous Mexican actress of all time.

A mesmerizing presence, she starred in 48 films from 1942 to 1966 and captivated the common people and the cultural elites alike with her deep voice, black, wavy hair, and brown eyes that were "alternately serene and stormy," as Mexican Nobel Prize winner Octavio Paz once wrote. Outstanding artists such as Diego Rivera and José Clemente Orozco painted her portrait.

Félix was just as famous for her strong will and fiery independence as for her beauty and acting prowess. She was, of course, galaxies away from the herd of nondescript bottle-blond beauties who populate today's Mexican TV soap operas and low-budget movies.

Her larger-than-life personality and biting remarks on everything from her own life to Mexico's cultural and political events made her a living myth. It was a part she relished, and which suited her to perfection.

"I have been a woman with the heart of a man. A woman of war," she recently said, explaining her success as an actress and her enduring hold on Mexico's imagination.

Paz seemed to agree.

"María Félix is a woman — such a woman — with the audacity to defy the ideas machos have constructed of what a woman should be," he wrote.

Popularly known as *La Doña* (the Lady) and *María Bonita* (Beautiful María) — the name of one of Mexico's most famous love songs written for her by Agustín Lara, the country's foremost composer and one of her five husbands — she was an outspoken defender of women's rights.

"I cannot complain about men. I have had tons of them and they have treated me fabulously well," she said in an interview, batting her long eyelashes. "But sometimes I had to hurt them to keep them from subjugating me."

Félix never fell for Hollywood's siren song — she did not speak English and deemed the parts offered to her as shallow and stereotypical — but she was the brightest symbol of the golden era of Mexican cinema in the 1940s and 1950s.

Among her best known films are **DOÑA BÁRBARA**, **LA MUJER SIN ALMA** ("Woman Without a Soul") and **LA GENERALA** ("The Woman General") in which she played the strong women that became her trademark, and that, perhaps fairly, in time became indistinguishable in the public mind from her real-life persona.

She had thousands of followers in Latin America and Europe, and the noted Jean Renoir directed her in **FRENCH CAN-CAN** a movie she was particularly proud of.

President Vicente Fox attended a memorial service Monday night at the capital's Palace of Fine Arts. Thousands of Mexicans of every social class crowded

the surrounding streets in an emotional show of love for "*La Doña*."

María Félix was still glamorous when she died in her sleep this past April 8th. But María Bonita, *mestizo* woman of beauty and strength, is very much alive in the collective memory of her people.

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A VERY SELECTIVE MARIA FELIX FILMOGRAPHY:

EL PEÑÓN DE LAS ÁNIMAS (1942)

DONA BARBARA (1943)

ENAMORADA (1946)

THE AFFAIRS OF MESSALINA (1954)

FRENCH CAN CAN (1955)

BEYOND ALL LIMITS (1957)

THE GUNS OF JUANA GALLO (1958)

THE SOLDIERS OF PANCHE VILLA (1959)

FEVER MOUNTS IN EL PAO (1961)

LA GENERALA (1970)

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María Félix by the titles...

A peek at the person.

By Kevin Collins

EL PENON DE LAS ANIMAS

María made her screen debut in this minor 1942 film and is listed in the credits under her complete name: María de los Angeles Félix. Her leading man was **Jorge Negrete**. During the filming there was constant bickering between the beautiful rookie and the famous *charro* singer. Interest ran higher behind the scenes than on the screen as rumors suggested that Félix and Negrete hated each other at first sight. Nevertheless, across the years a great storybook passion developed between them.

DOÑA BARBARA

Félix's legend of devouring men took shape with this 1943 film based on a novel by **Rómulo Gallegos**. *La Doña* is a woman whose powers of seduction and absence of mercy made her the archetypal consumer of men. Years later María recalled the role that made her a sensation, "My character was a woman who had already given up everything. I had to replace the years that I had lost with firmness, will and all the force of my character." What she didn't like, apparently, was her leading man, **Julian Soler**, claiming that no one ever had the desire to do anything naughty with him.

AMOK

In this 1944 production, María returned to get even with actor Julian Soler. The film's main points of interest: Félix appeared on screen for the first time with blonde hair and she also played two roles, Mrs. Travis and Mrs. Belmont. One of her most memorable roles.

VERTIGO

No, not the Hitchcock thriller, this 1945 film, this **VERTIGO** is another page torn right out of the story of a woman of hard temperament and indomitable

(Continued on page 61)

A FORBIDDEN JOURNEY THROUGH ELVIRA'S HAUNTED HILLS

According to **Mark Pierson**, **Cassandra** ("Elvira") **Peterson's** husband and producer, the spirit of Elvira's latest movie began to take shape in September of 1999 when the Groundlings Theatre Company dedicated the theater itself in the name of **Phil Hartman**.

A little backstory: when Hartman died, his two brothers took some of his ashes and put them into boxes equipped with Magic 8-Balls. They set them up so that the only the 8-Ball's message would show through the box. **John** (*Movie Macabre*) **Paragon**, Cassandra's friend and writing partner, received one of the prophetic orbs-in-a-box and claims that the predictions have never been wrong.

On the night of the dedication, Paragon went home and had a dream about this proposed Elvira movie. The next morning he asked his trusty 8-Ball if the project should go forward and the answer was clear, "Definitely yes." Paragon got excited and called Mark and Cassandra and they all decided that now they had to make this movie one way or another.

ELVIRA'S HAUNTED HILLS is not a sequel to 1991's **ELVIRA: MISTRESS OF THE DARK**. "Not at all, no, absolutely not," affirms Mark. "You know, the first movie is contemporary, and this takes place in 1851 in Carpathia." When Elvira gets kicked out of an Inn for a slight monetary discrepancy, she is rescued by Dr. Bradley Bradley who takes her to stay at the castle Hellsbus in the hills high above the village. The family that haunts castle Hellsbus is pure HOLLYWEIRD and in true Roger Corman fashion Elvira just happens to resemble the quirky Vladimere Hellsbus' former "missing" wife Elura, also played by Peterson. Needless to say she doesn't have a ghost of a chance as **ROCKY HORROR PICTURE SHOW** star **Richard O'Brien** (Count Vladimere) hams it up in pure drive-in cinema style.

ELVIRA'S HAUNTED HILLS was shot in Romania at Media Pro Studios with the working title, **ELVIRA'S UN-PLEASANT DREAMS** and with most of its financing coming directly from Peterson, Pierson and family. Cassandra and John wrote the screenplay and director **Sam Irvin** picked up the megaphone and beret. This homage to AIP Poe films is pure camp as one might expect from the movie poster tag line that reads, "You never know what you'll find around the next curve!" The film has been roaming Hollywood's ghostly corridors seeking a release since its completion.

Cassandra Peterson is no stranger to luck - good and bad - as she survived a life threatening accident as a child, which left her with burns that covered a large percentage of her young body. She later became the youngest showgirl in Las Vegas at the age of 17. Raised on *Ed Wood*, *The Twilight Zone*, & yes, Vincent Price she later answered a local casting call to replace the deceased TV horror host **Seymour** at the independent Los Angeles television station KJH in what became *Movie Macabre* history in the eighties. National syndication and exposure for products like Coors beer shot her to fame as the most celebrated television horror host in pop culture. Her gothic celebrity caused her to be sued by vintage Los Angeles horror hostess **Vampira** who ironically starred in Cassandra's favorite cheesy film, **PLAN NINE FROM OUTER SPACE** from auteur **Edward Wood, Jr.** Cassandra Peterson denied lifting her Elvira character from Vampira and the case was thrown out of court.



SIRENS OF CINEMA: I wanted to find out about the Elvira character. In the first movie she portrayed herself as what I would call a witch. Is she a witch or is she a vampire type character? What is her character, or is it anything?

Cassandra: Well, you know, I don't know. I set it up sort of in the first movie that my mother was a sorceress or had like one foot in magic somehow, but that my father was just a mortal so, I'm just like a, I don't know, kind of a conglomeration of a little witch, a little vampire, but, you know, I never really put my finger on it. That way it leaves more open to the imagination...

SoC: How much of the real you is in the character?

Cassandra: People that know me really well say that there is actually a lot. Lately I started thinking that that is my personality as a teenager. That I was Elvira when I was a teenager and that's my secret real personality that I learned to cover over later as I grew older - thank God - because I'd hate to walk around acting like that all day. I actually think it is this other personality of mine that I use.

SoC: Now in real life you are a vegetarian, right...?

Cassandra: [Chuckles]. You know, I am, but I've

fallen off the vegetarian wagon recently. Hopefully I can get back on again soon.

SoC: ...Because I wanted to ask you about the blood sausage scene in the movie and if that was done with tofu or if it was done with real sausage?

Cassandra: No, in Romania it was done, believe me, with sausage because nothing... You can't get anything to eat there but sausage...Romania is very short on tofu. There's potatoes, cabbage and sausage, I think. That's it.

Mark: It's hard to get a good prosthetic arm or a descent tofu in Romania.

Cassandra: Yes, if you're trying to get a fake arm, don't ask for one in Romania. [Laughs].

SoC: Do you feel that it benefited the film by being over there in Romania as compared to Hollywood USA?

Cassandra: Oh well it totally benefited in that if we didn't have Romania we couldn't have made it. We couldn't have made it here, the same film, with the kind of money. So going to Romania was really our only choice. With the money that we had in the budget...they had good technicians, and we got a lot for our money, I'll tell you. They worked very hard and had to get paid very little, which is

awful, but there was no way we could've made our film here... it totally benefited in that if we didn't have Romania we couldn't have made it. We couldn't have made it here, the same film, with the kind of money.

SoC: Did you're whole family go with you on the shoot over in Romania?

Cassandra: No.

SoC: You basically spent Christmas holidays there didn't you?

Cassandra: Yeah we got back two days before Christmas so, no, my family did not go with me, just Mark.

SoC: Oh, that had to suck.

Cassandra: Yeah it did suck. Romania is not a place that I would have wanted to take my small daughter. And of course my niece is in school, and my daughter is in school, and we would of had to pull them out from almost two months of school and it is tough. It is tough over there. It's bordering on Third World time. It's really not a safe place for children and food... you know, food and water...

SoC: I bet you had to get a lot of shots and every-

thing too didn't you?

Cassandra: You didn't have to, no, no. Because it's in Europe, you really didn't have to. Some people did get shots, but I didn't. It's not that bad, but it'd be tough for a small child, let me tell you... I don't (my daughter) eating sausage everyday for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, you know? I just don't see it. Right now, I mean, you can't even get her to eat anything here.

SoC: Did you have any problems with the local people, maybe with their superstitions, or maybe they just don't like Hollywood people, or anything like that with the local people around there?

Cassandra: Well, they were pretty anti-Dracula and that whole thing. Yeah, every time you'd bring up Dracula, you know, say you were making this sort of vampire movie and immediately they're all, "Oh, you know, Vlad Tepes was really a great guy, and he just did that putting people on stakes thing because they had done so many atrocious things to them and so he was just getting retribution and he was really just a guy, and there's no such thing as a vampire here." and they get real panicked. He is like a hero.

Going to Transylvania, there were areas that we were working in that honestly were like 500 years behind the times. There are villages that have no indoor plumbing or electricity and everywhere you see oxen and horse-link carts. That's their main mode of transportation. I mean, it looked like 500 years ago. In the very beginning scene... Elvira jumps out of the window into the town street from the old inn and there's all these peasants mulling around with herds of geese in front of them and herds of oxen and, you know, all dressed in this peasant...

Mark: Flocks of geese, herds of oxen...

Cassandra: "Herds of geese," did I say? What did I say? Flocks of oxen? Did I say it the opposite way? ... Oh my God! Yeah, idiot! Ok! ... Herds of geese! [Laughs] ... Anyway, but all dressed up in this like, you know, medieval looking garb and stuff. And people said, "Oh my God, you got such fantastic peasants and costumes and everything..." and I'd go "Those aren't costumes honey, that was them!" We got people off the street! ... I mean, like "Oh, hey, want to be in a movie?" "Oh yeah!" And they were so sweet and so nice, and happy and smiley, and they really enjoyed it!

SoC: This is probably stupid question because I don't imagine they have cable...but I don't imagine they knew who you were did they?

Cassandra: Oh no, but they loved me, I'll tell ya! [Laughs]. They thought I was very interesting. They all wanted their picture taken with me and everything and it was so funny. It probably was just because, "oh, wow, she's in a movie and she looks pretty weird." But they were so nice. But, no, they didn't know who I was. Trust me, they didn't know. I don't think they'd know who James Dean was.

SoC: In actually doing your own thing, does this make you appreciate Ed Wood even more by actually going out there and almost being like him? Of course, the movie is a higher caliber than Ed Wood but...

Cassandra: Yes of course. Oh for God's sake, anything is higher caliber than Ed Wood. [Laughs]. It makes me appreciate small film, you know, in general. People who make films on their own and had small budgets. It's like, man, the odds are against

you. I mean, sure, making **TITANIC** is easy, you have all the money in the world! But when you're just scrounging and trying to do your best, I mean, I really have a new appreciation for anybody that does an independent film. It's tough, man. It's really tough. You're selling your house to get the money to pay for a coach and four white horses.

SoC: Let me ask you a hypothetical question, if Ed Wood could've asked you to be in one of his movies, would you have done it?

Cassandra: Oh, sure, I would. He's my kind of guy. That kind of... transvestite. Any guy who directs in high heels... Knowing who Ed is and being in it...? Vampira was in the movie and so it becomes a classic and you become famous for having done this horrible movie, you know, so... It's hard to say. Knowing who Ed Wood is now and having done it? Sure, of course. At the time? Depends how broke I was! And being offered a movie. I mean, I'm thinking in a different direction. No, now when we are offered a lot of really really low budget, "Oh can you be in this movie as Elvira or Cassandra?"... Usually we don't.

SoC: Well you have to be careful about people exploiting you too, because like for instance, the movie you did "Working Girls"... Where you did the dance scene... Everybody's just pumping it up "Elvira... da da da."

Cassandra: Yeah, I know. It's like "Hello?"

SoC: How do you feel about that?

Cassandra: Well I don't like it because it's not Elvira... If they said, "Cassandra Peterson," I don't care. I mean it's not something I think was wow, fabulous, gee I hope everybody sees this movie... [Chuckles]

SoC: At home I've got a film that I bought and it's got Elvira on the cover and it says Elvira on the box. I brought it home and you're not even in the film, and it's a porno film. You're not even in it.

Cassandra: Oh well that's nice...

SoC: I don't know if you know about this...

Cassandra: No! God help me!

SoC: Do you have a lot of this happen?

Cassandra: No.

SoC: Vampira...I understand of course, I'm sure you're tired of hearing about the lawsuit thing, but after that all occurred, did you and she ever have any conversations? Did she ever say anything to you?

Cassandra: Nope. Never saw her, heard from her, spoke to her, nothing, ever. No, that was that. The last time I heard anything about it was at the end of the Ed Wood movie. You know um... what's the name of it? **ED WOOD!** ... Hey, there you go!

SoC: For the role of Vampira in **ED WOOD**, what if someone had approached you about playing her? That would've been a bad thing right?

Cassandra: Yeah, it would've been a bad thing. Not that anyone asked me, but people kept saying "Oh you should play Morticia in the **ADDAMS FAMILY** remakes." But even if I were asked, I wouldn't want to do it because it's too similar to the Elvira character, but (it's) not the Elvira character. I mean, if it was something completely different, then there



*Elvira with actor Richard O'Brien as Vladimere Hellsubus in **ELVIRA'S HAUNTED HILLS**.*



would be no problem, but (it's) so close, but not Elvira. I wouldn't want to do that. That would be like compromising my character so, no, unfortunately I wouldn't do that ... Unless they offered me like a zillion dollars!

SoC: Well, money talks!

Cassandra: Yeah!

SoC: When you first created the character with the local T.V. station in L.A., did you always retain the rights to the character, or did you have to go through something with the T.V. station to get the rights back when you went off on your own.

Cassandra: You tell them that Marky. Let Mark tell you that.

Mark: Well the show started in September of 1981. By '86 we had the rights to the character. We re-negotiated our contract each year, year to year, because KHJ at that time only had a license year to year.... When Elvira started, her show was the most profitable show on the station. It was more profitable than the Lakers because it cost no money to make. It got huge ratings. It was a cash cow for them. It was making them millions of dollars each year and they would have to re-negotiate each year, so we kept saying, "let us do a fan club, let us do merchandising, let us do appearances...and let us do this, let us do that." And over the four years of re-negotiation we obtained all rights to the character.

Cassandra: They were looking for a horror host, or hostess, to replace Seymour the horror host here for years. He had died, so they were going to do another horror host. They had put ads in the papers everywhere and had seen a million people and hadn't really liked anyone and then a friend of mine called and said, "They want a horror host and I know the guy who is going to direct the show and he'd like some comedian woman who does comedy who looks sexy and stuff and you'd be perfect." And he came down and saw me and he really liked this character, and this sort of thing that I was doing which was kind of a valley girl, stupid, dumb blonde, sort of valley girl-actress type. He had me audition and I did it as myself and then they gave me the part and they said, "You have to come up with a look...You have to come up with a costume because you have to look scary, you know, it's horror movies!

And so a friend of mine designed the whole look; the hairdo, and the make-up, and the dress. And you know, I said, "Oh my God! I can't wear that on TV." And he said, "Well, just show them." I re-

member showing them this sketch that he had drawn and they go, "Oh, could you make the slit a little higher on the leg?" I was like, "Okay, guess it's no problem." And so I went on and did the show and we came up with the name, the name Elvira. We didn't have a name the day we were going to shoot. Everybody - everyone meaning like the crew that was around - put what they thought would be the best name in a can and I drew it out and it was Elvira.

SoC: Do you recall what some of the other names were by chance?

Cassandra: I only remember mine. I wanted it to be Cassandra. Boy, that would have been such a mess. [Laughs]. Because imagine, my name is Cassandra, and my character's name would have been Cassandra, and we look completely different. Thank God I didn't pick my name out!

SoC: Do you get irritated when people come up to you and call you Elvira?

Cassandra: I'm used to it by now. I'm like, "Yeah?"

SoC: So when you did this, would you say that you were a horror fan?

Cassandra: Oh yeah, very much so. I've always been, since I was a kid. When I was a little kid the Vincent Price series of movies, **PIT AND THE PENDULUM** and **TOMB OF LIGEIA** and all those were like my favorite movies. Plus I was very much into TV. I was into the "Twilight Zone," "Alfred Hitchcock"... that's all the stuff I grew up with, you know? I was a big fan of that. I was the only little girl I knew who, while other little girls were collecting Barbies, I collected the Ravell model kits of the Mummy, Frankenstein, and Dracula... God, I wish I still had mine! My mother got rid of everything I had... Girls weren't doing that. That was kind of a boy thing. So I was way into it.

SoC: Do you remember the character Vampirella? Do you think that that has any resemblance to Elvira?

Cassandra: I didn't know about Vampirella at the time but I wanted my character to embody all of that you know? I mean, what's a female going to look like that's going to be scary? You know what I mean? They said one thing, "You have to have black hair!" I'm going, "Black hair? No, no! I'm not going to dye my hair!" And my friend said, "Don't freak out, we'll make a wig. We'll get a wig." And he did the big high hairdo because he was in love with the Ronettes from the '60s. He said, "I'm going to give a Ronette hairdo... a Ronnie

Spector hairdo." I'm like, "Oh great. It's called a knowledge bump!" That hairdo was actually called a knowledge bump. And he got the make-up out of a Kabuki make-up book that he had...and then the dress he just tried to make as tight and sexy as he could possibly do it, and black.

SoC: Do you think being a former showgirl helped?

Cassandra: Oh yeah, I think so. I don't know in what ways, but I think it helped somehow.

SoC: What got you into being a showgirl? You started when you were 17?

Cassandra: I had a dream to be a showgirl in Vegas. From the time I was 14 and saw VIVA LAS VEGAS with Elvis Presley and Anne Margaret, I got fixated on the movie. I mean fixated! Really. I went to it and I just wanted it to be my life...and I started telling everybody, "I'm going to go to Vegas and I'm going to be a showgirl. That's what I'm going to do..." And so that was when I was about 14...then when I was about 16, I went with my parents on vacation...we were driving from Colorado to L.A. and we stopped in Vegas like we always did every year. I was getting pretty mature looking by that point. I was very busty and had big red hair with wiglets stuck in my hair and everything. I begged my parents to (go to) one of the shows there. One of the big glamour, feather type, showgirl shows. My parents said, "Well, dress up and put on a ton of make-up so you look like the right age, and we'll take you." So I dressed up, I had my push-up bra and tons of make-up and eyelashes and everything.

So I looked like a showgirl and we went in and we sat down...in the back. And the *Maitre d'* walked over to the table, stares at me, and goes, "Are you in one of the shows?" And I go, "Oh, no, no, no, no." Like, "Oh God, don't talk to me, I don't want to get thrown out!" And I was even there having a glass of champagne. My parents let me have my first glass of champagne in front of them. They didn't know when they weren't around I was like chugging it so... [Laughs]. No, usually not champagne, more like ripple or something. So the *Maitre d'* said, "Oh, you know tonight is the last night of the show (next door), they're closing, and they are auditioning...for a different show tomorrow." And I go, "Oh, very interesting!" [Laughs]. And he said, "You know, you look like a showgirl. You should try out." And I'm going, "but..." and I was sitting there and I couldn't believe it.

Well, like five minutes later comes this woman, a French woman, and she goes, "Hello, my name is



Fluff." [Laughs]. Her name was really Fluff. And she said, "Why don't you come back stage with me?" I'm like, "Uh, what for?" And she said, "Oh, come back stage. I want to introduce you to the stage manager and some people backstage." I'm like, "Oh my God, oh my God! So she takes me. My parents are both freaking out. They think they're going to get busted for bringing a minor into a casino. And I go back there and they said, "Have you ever danced before?" And I said, "Yes, I am a dancer, that's what I do." I was a go-go girl, and also I'd taken dance since I was three years old... And they said, "We'll put on a record and can you just dance to it for us? Just, you know, move. You don't have to do anything formal, just dance. We want to see how you move." And I did. Then they said, "Can you meet with the producer of the show in the morning?" I like break down and started crying. I said, "I can't... I'm only 17. I'm not supposed to be here, blah, blah." And they go, "Calm down, it's okay. We won't tell anybody. But if your parents sign a release form, you can be in the show." They said, "You can't come in the casino but you can come in the back door and be in the show." And I'm like, "You're kidding!"

So I go to the producer the next day. The producer hires me, says I can be in the show. My parents said, "No way in hell." And they drag me back to Colorado. We went on our vacation in California and back to Colorado. I put my parents through three months of living hell and then finally they signed the release. The people from Vegas kept calling... They kept talking to my parents, and talking to me. They said, "We really want you in the show." And next thing I know I was graduated from high school and I like just got a car and just drove straight to Vegas. My aunt went with me to drive there so I wouldn't have to drive by myself and I got an apartment with a girlfriend from Colorado and started rehearsals right then...when I was 17...

SoC: When the first movie came out, I understand you were nominated for a Razzie award. I understand they called you the worst actress. What did you think about that?

Cassandra: I loved that. I think it's flattering. [Laughs]. I thought it was good. Any award... It's like, that was my goal. I don't take it personally because I'm playing a character and the character is supposed to be kind of dorky and bad, so it's not like, "Oh, I'm a terrible actress." I really didn't take it that way.

SoC: What do you tell your daughter about what



The Elvira we know and love! Below: Behind-the-scenes on ELVIRA'S HUANTED HILLS.

you do? Does she understand what you do?

Cassandra: Yeah, I think she totally understands it. She's 6. I think she totally gets it. To her that's just a part of life. That's what mommy does, you know? The funniest thing she's ever said to me was around Halloween and I start painting my nails black and she came in and goes, "Uh, oh mommy, your nails turned black. You're starting to turn into Elvira!" [Laughs]. Like it's some weird transformation that happens. And she said to Mark the other day, "When mommy dies, can I be Elvira?"

SoC: That's what I was wondering, if you think she's going to be Elvira someday? Like maybe when you're 80 or whatever?

Cassandra: I don't know. Who knows? I'd rather she have some little more stable job, but right now she wants to be either Elvira or a paleontologist, so one of those, you know?

SoC: Something else that I read on the Internet, that I don't know if it was true or not. It said that

when you were a child that you were burned?

Cassandra: Yeah...I was two years old, about three, and we lived on a farm in Kansas and my mom was dying Easter eggs and I crawled up on this chair to look at the eggs boiling in this big giant kettle and I started to fall off the chair and pulled the kettle of boiling water on top of me. And so, 35% of my body is skin grafting. Yeah. Luckily it's all the parts that don't show with Elvira. You know, it was pretty traumatic. I almost didn't survive.

SoC: Wow, really?

Cassandra: 35% of your body, back in those days - I hate to tell you how long ago - it was not very good chances of survival because of the infection afterwards.

SoC: How did you get involved with Knott's Berry Farm?

Cassandra: I don't know. They called us I guess? I think they wanted to replace Wolfman Jack.

SoC: It's your own dancers and everything?

Cassandra: Yeah, we have a choreographer and generally he chooses the dancers. I go to some of the auditions and we choose dancers and singers. First we write it and get the ideas going, and chose the songs, and get the costumes made. It's a big production. It's a very big production...

SoC: I noticed that at the end of one of the shows, as the platform was going back you lost your balance a little bit and one of your dancers held you up. Of course you've got the heels and everything. Has there ever been any accidents?

Cassandra: Last year. Did you notice that there was a big tapestry of Elvira in front of me? It's canvas but they pull it up right before I appear. There's a poof of smoke and the tapestry whips up and then I'm there. And I walk out and the tapestry whips up and whip... and it hits me in the face. I mean, so hard... like have you ever been snapped with a towel? This is a big heavy canvas thing and it snapped me like that straight in the nose, right in the face. I felt like my nose was bleeding. I felt like my nose was broken! It hurt so bad! The poof of smoke subsides and I'm standing on stage going, "My God!" And the dancers grab my arms and pull me down to the front, and I'm going "Oh no, Don't. Stop!" [Laughs]. And they pull me clear to the front of the stage, and then I just walk off, and the audience is like, "What is up with that?" But I was okay. I had to just catch my breath...I hardly knew where I was for a second, then I was okay and we went back on and did the show. But what



a great start to a show! [Laughs].

SoC: We were a little confused with the film that you were showing which I guess was your CBS pilot Elvira show. I hadn't heard of that. I guess that never made it to air or?

Mark: We made it in '93 with 20th Century Television, it's a Fox Company, for CBS and we made the pilot and it just didn't get picked up. You know, more shows that get a pilot don't get picked up than do. You know, each network makes so many and then there's one person who picks and chooses at the end of the day.

Cassandra: It was called the "Elvira Show" and...

Mark: And at CBS it was Howard Springer and he now runs Sony. At the time he was at the top of CBS and he looked at the pilots and decided against Elvira at the time, and you know, that's kind of like it. After that happens it's over.

SoC: So, you actually were involved with Fellini and did a movie with him?

Cassandra: Very briefly. Yeah. When I went to Italy... it was like meeting him right off the street practically. I was walking down the street and I heard a guy calling my name and it was a guy who I'd met in Vegas who was a student director working on his film. And he said, "You want to meet Mr. Fellini?" And I said, "Oh my God, yes." and he took me over and he introduced me to him. And Fellini said, "Oh my God, you look like my wife Giulietta Masina when she was young." He said, "Would you like a part in my film?" I mean literally, just said, "Would you like..." "Oh, Okay!" You know? So I was just an extra. I was on for about 30 seconds. I mean, you blink and I'm gone.

SoC: And you speak fluent Italian right?

Cassandra: After I stayed in Italy for about a year and a half. Yeah.

SoC: And you were the lead singer of a rock band?

Cassandra: That's how I really learned Italian. Traveling around with five Italians and nobody spoke English. And I was forced to learn to speak Italian or I would have gone insane, you know? Because I can't communicate!

SoC: What's this I heard about you actually replacing Pamela Lee Anderson in a gay nightclub?

Mark: Yeah. In '95 or '96 when we left Coors after nine years to do Elvira's Night Brew beer for this new company Beverage International Group. Coors was pretty upset that Elvira left after all those years. And it just so happened that same Halloween Elvira was invited to make an appearance at the biggest gay club in Colorado, in Denver. I guess Peter Coors was not happy about Elvira coming back to his hometown, so he made an offer to the club. That year when Elvira left Coors they hired Pamela Lee Anderson to be the new Queen of Halloween, as Coors likes to call it.

Cassandra: Yeah, you know her, Pamela Anderson, the Queen of Halloween!

SoC: That's what I was going to say... I don't get the association.

Cassandra: We didn't get it either.

Mark: Coors did everything to make us fail. She went to the Great American Beer Festival in Colorado. It's the biggest of the big beer festivals. And on her second day there they wouldn't let her into the auditorium because her dress was too sexy.

Cassandra: They brought police to stop me from

going in. Even though they had the Swedish Bikini Team, they stopped me! The police stopped me from going in. And I said, "This is Elvira. This is the dress I wear everyday. I am in there on ads and stuff." And they said, "Well you can't come in person." And we know it was Coors who hired the police to tell them not to let me in. And then at the nightclub thing...

Mark: ...Just a couple of months later she was going to come back and Peter Coors went down to the club and told him, "Well I'll get you Pamela Anderson for free."

Cassandra: ...if you give up Elvira.

Mark: ...if you give up Elvira. And the guy said, "Well this is a gay bar..."

Cassandra: The guy said, "Are you joking? What the heck are we going to do with Pamela Anderson?" [Laughs].

SoC: Do you ever hear from any feminists groups who say they don't like the way you portray women



as sexy, with cleavage and all that?

Cassandra: Maybe I've gotten a few letters like that, but overwhelmingly more (positive ones). Elvira stands for like women's rights. You know, she doesn't take any crap from men. And she does what she wants to do, and you know, she's a figure that actually stands up for women. The people with the trouble with the cleavage and stuff is like the really repressed, Christian right, afraid of breasts...Get over it. Grow up. God!

SoC: And you're an animal rights activist too...

Cassandra: Um, I don't know. I do a lot of work for PETA and animal rights things whenever I can. And that's one of our pet causes. AIDs and animal rights are two of the biggest things that I concentrate on although I like other charities, of course. Anything I have time to do, you know?

SoC: And you actually went up against Ringling Brothers Circus because you didn't want elephants in the show?

Cassandra: Yeah. It's really terrible. There's a bunch of things with the circus. It's terrible cruelty that they use elephants. Elephants, first of

all, need like a 30-mile radius just to live comfortably. That's how far they walk everyday. You have them in a circus, they're stuck in a train car. They use these horrible bull hooks to train them. They don't train them by rewarding them. They train them by beating them. Young elephants are beaten until just they fall down on their knees and are completely broken. And then they're trained from there to do unnatural things that elephants aren't supposed to do. They're wild animals. They're not pets, you know? They're not domesticated animals. They're not house cats. They're wild and they deserve to be where they are supposed to be...not performing and making people laugh and humiliating themselves in front of people for people's entertainment. And then you look at circuses like Cirque du Soleil. It's one of the most entertaining circuses in the world and it doesn't have a single animal in it. So it's not like "Down with all circuses!" It's just that I'd love to see like trained dog acts - dogs like to perform, you know? If you treat them well, they love (it)...

SoC: Like the dog in your first film right?

Cassandra: Yeah! Yeah. I mean, let me tell you, that dog was more spoiled than me, and he was making a lot more money than me probably.

SoC: You did a series in Australia that was similar to "Movie Macabre."

Cassandra: Yeah it was "Thriller Theatre" and it was a series of 20 shows for the most popular television station in Sydney...

Mark: Network 10.

Cassandra: And it was just like my regular show, only for Australia. Same thing. And I think it would have gone on to do something but Network 10 burned and crashed or something...

SoC: Why do you think all the horror hosts basically died out but you're still here and still successful? What do you have that they didn't have?

Cassandra: Cleavage! [Laughs]. ...No, number one, you know when you were a kid and there were horror hosts everywhere in the whole country? And any little station could have a horror host because they'd get these packages of horror movies? Now these packages of horror movies are unavailable. So that's one thing... You can't get those packages inexpensively anymore. They used to be practically giving the damn things away. Now they're a fortune. They're owned by some big conglomerate, and you can't get them. But, the other reason I got more filler is rather than being local, I was local in Hollywood. And first of all, I think I got more notoriety being here, more television, more commercials.

And then we were able to syndicate my show, which went national. Although what's his name had gone partially national... That great guy. That great guy in Philadelphia... Zachary... He didn't go national...but he was the closest thing to getting national... But my show was broadcast nationally. It looked like it was local. Everybody in every little town thinks that I lived there. They're all, "You're from Arkansas, right?" Because they see the show and they think it's so cheesy that you couldn't possibly really have made it in Hollywood. So that's part of it. And then the Coors campaign and the Pepsi campaign really helped my national visibility. People all over the country saw me...I think that's how I'm still around. And of course, I'm much, much more beautiful and talented than the rest of them. [Laughs]. I'm not really going to say

that! I'm kidding!

SoC: Would you like to do that again? I know you're doing movies and everything but let's say, "Movie Macabre," would you like to do something like that again, weekly?

Cassandra: I would. I'd love to do that. I'd love to do that again! I mean, I've been wanting to do that since the day that I stopped. It was a fun show. It was a cheap show to do. It was easy. People loved it. I just don't know if it's ever going to happen. .

SoC: Does it annoy you that you've been more successful as Elvira than as Cassandra as an actress?

Cassandra: No, because I really am Cassandra Peterson. [Laughs]. You may not know this, but I really am. No, you know, I'm like happy, fulfilled as an actor in any circumstance. Wearing a clown suit, or whatever. It doesn't matter. I never feel like, "Oh God, I've got to break out of this character." I'm just happy I found work and support myself and my family with the career I want to do.

SoC: What do you foresee yourself as doing later on in life, in retirement?

Cassandra: I don't know. Sometimes I think about maybe acting as myself in something else, I mean plays or doing acting work, maybe not. Maybe... sometimes I really don't want to be an actor at all. Maybe writing. I like writing. You don't have to look good.

SoC: What is your favorite role you enjoyed other than Elvira... when you were yourself? Well you were never yourself, but, I mean, you know...

Cassandra: Oh God. The best thing that I did that wasn't Elvira... I was already Elvira but I got this part in Africa with Richard Chamberlain and **ALLAN QUATERMAINE AND THE LOST CITY OF GOLD** - which I'm in it not but one second because of a long bizarre set of circumstances - but I was like the villain in the movie. And I went over to Africa for two months, which is an incredible experience, in Zimbabwe, had the most amazing time, and met Richard Chamberlain. We became great friends and had a wonderful time together there and it was just a great experience. And doing this weird part where I was this villainess woman who spoke a weird made-up language that they concocted. But working in

Africa and animals... baboons would be sitting on the catering tables in the morning when you came to work and there'd be a herd of hippos you'd see down by the river when you got up in the morning and monkeys would come in your room and eat (and) steal your trays and stuff when you were ordering room service. [Laughs]. It was great.

SoC: You lived in a haunted house?

Cassandra: Yeah. I would say it was kind of haunted, yeah. We had a house that was pretty bizarre...very... A lot of weird things went on there. Eventually we had a minister come there and use some sage and go through the house and kind of cleanse it because, I'll tell ya, too many weird things were going on. Because it was an old house built in 1910 and it had had three deaths in the house...three suspicious deaths. Well, a suicide and two murders, and there was some weird stuff going on there. We kept hearing things. It was bizarre.

SoC: Do you believe in the supernatural?

Cassandra: Oh yeah. Definitely.

SoC: And you lived by O.J. at one time didn't you?

Cassandra: (Chuckles). Yeah we moved from there to like O.J.'s area. [Laughs]. Yeah. And then we moved away from O.J.'s area.

SoC: I heard you're like with the PTA or something too, is that right?

Cassandra: Yeah, I am involved with our children's stuff and all that. We hang out with more of the normal people. Not so many show biz types. Richard Chamberlain is one of the few exceptions.

SoC: Now you had a child quite late in life... What did that mean to you, having a child?

Cassandra: Oh well, we had tried for years before and I had six miscarriages and then finally got pregnant with her when I was 43. So that was amazing. Ugh! It was a miracle! [Laughs]. It was very hard. I don't recommend it! I had 26 hours of labor. It was hell, and then ended up having to have a C-section... But we didn't do any fertility. Nothing could stop me from having miscarriages. They didn't know what was wrong. They did all kinds of tests. They couldn't find anything that should be causing it whatsoever. I don't know. I had a great pregnancy. I was doing workout videos when I was pregnant. I gained exactly 35 pounds. I felt so



energetic and really good, and it all went really smooth. We had a totally healthy baby and...in the nick of time! I wouldn't have wanted to be any older and had the baby, let me tell ya! That is it, definitely the end of the line.

SoC: I take it you must do like the gym thing or something. You've got to be doing something to stay looking the way you do. What's your program like?

Cassandra: Before I did the movie I was really exercising everyday, like 7 days a week I would say. And I did 5 days a week with a trainer and then walked 7 days everyday along with that for like a half an hour to an hour. Now, since I came back from the movie - I don't think I've recovered from the movie yet. I do a couple of times a week with a trainer and walking as often as I can, maybe 5 days a week. I need to step that up. I can tell. [Laughs] It's starting to show.

SoC: So I heard you stabbed Richard O'Brien?

Cassandra: Yes. I poked him with my knife accidentally... just missed his eye with my knife, my little dagger. I just hit him the eye and bridge of his nose!

SoC: What was it like working with Richard?

Cassandra: Oh it was great. Well, yeah... well, Richard and I had conflicting opinions. He liked to do things his own way and kind of be in charge and he liked to change the lines of the script to what he thought would be better.

SoC: Did that bother you?

Cassandra: No, well, not until he started doing it all the time. I mean, at first, once in a while you change a line because you'd think it's better. That's fine. But pretty soon he would change almost every line, and it was kind of like, "Um, Richard, that's not the line." But as a person and an actor he's great. He's just the life of the party. Even after the shoot for a day was done, I'd go home and go right to bed and he'd go out and party all night. And he looks great! That's the annoying thing; he looks great! I mean, it's not fair. I try hard to look like I do. I mean, I do everything right, I eat well, I get sleep, I exercise. And Richard does everything wrong and still looks better than I do! [Laughs]

This just in: **ELVIRA'S HAUNTED HILLS** will be available on VHS and DVD from The Elvira Movie Company on October 1st...
no trick, it's a treat!

Everything but the kitchen sink in the grand finale of **ELVIRA'S HAUNTED HILLS**.



Siren's Preview: SO CLOSE's KAREN MOK

"Being beautiful, being smart, being deadly is what they do best." – Promo for Karen Mok, Shu Qi and Vicky Zhao-Wei in Corey Yuen's **SO CLOSE**.

Karen Mok is one of the current workhorses of Hong Kong cinema. She rarely gets the lead role but she always turns in a strong supporting performance and often turns workaday trite fare into something very interesting. Lately her box-office appeal is such that she's brought in for meaningless cameos in the biggest Hong Kong productions; witness her computer engineer with no script impact in **Gigi Leung's** runaway hit **LA BRASSIERE** and her dreadlocked and mustachioed moments as famous soccer star Gullit in **Stephen Chow's** groundbreaking **SHAOLIN SOCCER**.

With a top Hong Kong education behind her, she also studied abroad in Trieste, Italy and London, England and has perfected a top-notch command of English with a lovely tint of British accent. In fact, she speaks fluent Cantonese, Mandarin, English, French and Italian.

While in London, she auditioned for a role in "*Miss Saigon*" and, though she was chosen for the production, she decided to return to Hong Kong to accept a recording contract. Over the years she has recorded several albums in Hong Kong to varied levels of success and she's been appearing in Hong Kong films since 1994. Not one to stick to the popular mold, she's wanted to bring more jazz influences into her record albums but that style has just not caught on yet with Hong Kong consumers.

Never shy, she's outspoken and self-confident without being coming off as brash or boastful. She's one of the few Hong Kong acting professionals who makes it clear that she'd like a shot at Hollywood success. Her cause for concern, however, is that most American casting agents usually look for more ethnic looking Chinese actresses to fill roles in American films and Karen's mixed heritage has produced an artist with a beautiful but non-racially specific appearance.

Now starring with **Shu Qi** and **Vicky Zhao-**

Wei in Columbia Pictures **SO CLOSE**, Karen hopes that this major production will be well-received in America and all around the world so that she can put her acting career into overdrive.

If you haven't caught **SO CLOSE** yet, why not take a quick peek back at some of Mok's previous film appearances? In our next issue, we'll give you the scoop on both **SO CLOSE** and Karen's other new release **HAUNTED OFFICE**.

A CHINESE ODYSSEY, Parts I and II (1995) - Directed by Jeff Lau. Starring Stephen Chow, Ng Man-tat, Yammie Nam, Karen Mok, Athena Chu.

Nowadays it is fairly common practice for Hong Kong filmmakers to direct their films with an international audience – or at least the hope of foreign distribution in mind. Though these new films are most definitely "Hong Kong" films in terms of theme, production and flavor, they are generally more universal in their approach to things. This mid-'90s epic makes no such claim on universal appeal. **A CHINESE ODYSSEY** is deeply entrenched in Chinese lore and practices and, with **Stephen Chow** – and his peculiar (but locally effective) trademark *mo-lei-to* (makes no sense) comedy – as its star, both **Parts I and II** are aimed directly at the Hong Kong and near-Asian markets. There's little chance of either half of this *Odyssey* being imported to your local Cineplex in an English dubbed version *a la* **IRON MONKEY** or **DRUNKEN MASTER 2**.

That said, despite its myriad of ghosts, a reluctant human to human/simian transformation, a Longevity Monk, half-woman/half-spider monsters, time travel and cryptic ancient Chinese folklore, the frenetically paced action and curious characters do mesh in an oddball variation on the tradition Monkey King epic that has enthralled Chinese storytellers for ages on end.

Part I, subtitled **PANDORA'S BOX**, is probably the funnier half of the saga. With its roots in the timeless tale "A Journey to the West," Chow's Monkey King has been sentenced to become human until his master, the Longevity Monk, returns him back into a god. But 500 years have gone by and the Monkey King is now some half-witted drifter named Joker who's have a devil a time with two evil sister spirits (Mok and **Yammie Nam**). The sisters have somehow figured out that the Monkey King is going to show up soon at the Joker's desert compound. They've figured out part of the equation because the Monkey King has shown up, only even they don't realize that he's in human form and the unknowing hapless Joker. That's only the half of it. In order to return to his god state, Monkey King needs to complete his journey to the West. But in order to complete the journey, he needs the Longevity Monk. In order to have the long dead Longevity Monk, Joker must travel back in time. In order to travel back in time, Joker must use a device called Pandora's Box. Once he travels back to a time when the Longevity Monk was alive, the Monk can turn him back into a Monkey and together they can complete their journey and restore the Monkey King back into a god. Great stuff for aficionados of the Hong Kong genre, but we're not sure how it'll play in Peoria.

Mok is thoroughly engaging as one of the evil spirit sisters, mixing a perfect blend of comedy, horror and allure into her performance. She even gets to marry the leading man at the end of the film. It's not really a starring role but it's a nice introduction to Mok's Hong Kong work. Stephen Chow performs at his usual level so take that as an invitation or a warning depending upon your taste. (Chow's brand of humor is often compared to **Jerry Lewis** or **Jim Carrey**...love it or leave it.). For our Hong Kong dollar, the star of



Karen Mok and Shu Qi are **SO CLOSE**.

the show is **Ng Man-Tat** who goes through Hell and back with his typical aplomb. Man-Tat might just be the most tortured supporting actor in Hong Kong movie history.

CINDERELLA, Part II of this wacky journey, finds Chow's Monkey King back in time but separated from his wife (Mok) who is back in the present – which is 500 years in the future. The Pandora's Box has been stolen by an immortal named Xixia (**Athena Chu**) who goes about making life miserable for the Monkey King by changing personalities and generally being an immortal bitch. Though she's the object of Chow's affections and intentions throughout the entire plot, Karen Mok has even less screen time in Part II than in Part I. But if you've made it through the first half of **A CHINESE ODYSSEY**, you can't stop there...for viewers of Part I, Part II is a must-see.

Review by Albert O'Dalby

SEXY AND DANGEROUS (1996) Directed by Billy Tang. Starring Loletta Lee, Karen Mok, Francis Ng, Michael Tong.

This is a fairly run of the mill triad potboiler that is saved from obscurity by the atypical girls as friends angle with **Loletta Lee** and Karen Mok at its core. Most films about the underworld of Hong Kong triads are male dominated and the few females that put in appearances are usually glamorous but tough molls, weak but sexy girlfriends, or the good but put upon victims. The occasional female triad boss shows up on rare occasion (see Sandra Ng in **PORTLAND STREET BLUES**) but that's really the exception that proves a rule.

Rival triads target Marble (Lee) and Van (Mok) for all sorts of nasty revenge because Marble used to be the girlfriend of handsome triad leader Brother One (**Michael Tong**). Brother One is not too happy that Marble has rejected him and One's most recent bimbo is looking for Marble's head on the business end of a chopstick because she was once One's main squeeze. There's plenty of violence and deception, enough to satisfy the average triad or mafia fan but there's little honest character development and an overall sense of rushed production permeates the entire 92 minutes. But, hey, someone gets acid thrown into his face and one of the good girls gets gang-raped, so you know the territory.

About the only thing **SEXY AND DANGEROUS** has going for it is the friendship that builds between Marble and Van. They hang tough and stay true to each other like real sisters of the street. If that relationship had been explored more and some of the ill-suited comedy had been dropped, **SEXY AND DANGEROUS** could have reached a par with the much more successful male-dominated **YOUNG AND DANGEROUS** series.

Karen Mok's sleek Van definitely steals the show from the other leads. With her close-cropped hair and her form-fitting cycle suits, she's the hottest thing on wheels on the streets of Causeway Bay.

We can't recommend **SEXY AND DANGEROUS** to anyone who wants to watch a good movie but if you're in the mood to discover this promising young actress in her earliest stages of development, then give it a shot.

Review by Albert O'Dalby

LAWYER, LAWYER (1997) – Directed by Joe Ma. Starring Stephen Chow, Eric Kot, Karen Mok, Chingmy Yau, Bowie Lam.

It's Stephen Chow time again. **LAWYER, LAWYER** seems to be a comedy that had great possibilities but somewhere along the line its life and spirit was sucked out of it. Chow is fun-loving Chan Mong-Gut, a lawyer in 1899 China who is called upon to defend his loyal student Foon (**Eric Kot**) in Hong Kong's British court system after he's been set up on murder charges by a pair of brothers out to seek an inheritance.

While there's plenty of Chow's familiar goofy antics on display, much of the comedy is dialogue driven and that's bound to keep hordes of non-Chinese viewers out of the laugh loop. In fact, some of the banter is so purely Chinese – sometimes wordplay based on the appearance of Chinese language characters – that many of the jokes in the subtitles have no relationship to the dialogue spoken on screen. While this

might make for easier understanding by English speaking audiences, it undoubtedly robs the production of its original feel in a few places, perhaps sapping some of the élan out of it.

If you can stand comedy that's well over the edge and down in the gutter, then you'll be grinning from ear to ear when Chow plays a "practical" joke on a band of beggars that involves covering them in feces, spraying them with urine that's been laced with a laxative. When the pitiful group is struck with explosive diarrhea and is so desperate to wipe themselves clean, the merciless jokester provides them with precious paper money as the only utensil to do the dirty deed. If you haven't been repulsed yet, the paper money is laced with a drug that causes painful itching.

Another scene that promises fun for the entire family has Mok and Chow inspecting Kot's hind region while he expels dominoes and mahjong tiles – as the new guy in prison, he's the one who has to carry around the game pieces for the other inmates. Cute, right? Not that Chow and Co. won't wrangle the last nervous guffaw out of that situation...once Kot has expelled his "load," he asks Mok and Chow to put it all back in. If you're still laughing and holding on to your lunch, Chow feels so sorry for Kot that he gives him a boiled chicken leg to hold onto for a snack. Guess where he stores it for safekeeping? And, of course, while sticking it in, Chow just has to lose his ring, doesn't he? And you're not going to be surprised or repulsed later on when Kot extends a friendly gesture by offering that same boiled chicken leg to one of the prison guards.

It's all done with impeccable taste and the straightest of faces. Who says humor isn't universal?

Karen Mok gets plenty of screen time as Chow's wife who has returned from her stay in England. She went abroad to study English law but found it too difficult and took up fashion design instead. Needless to say, this doesn't help Chow very much when he's up against a prickly judge who follows the letter of the law in his courtroom. While we get to see Karen in an array of fashions – and she looks great in all of them – Chow is undeniably the center of attention from start to finish. Mok and Kot get to pick up a few of the comic crumbs left after Chow chows down on the scenery while poor **Chingmy Yau** is left with little to do but stand around and look cute. Rest assured, Chingmy handles it well.

At the end of the day, it is the letter of the law that saves the day and everyone goes home happy. If you don't mind reading more into the subtitles than the writers present you with, then you might have a smile on your face too.

Review by Kevin Collins

THE IRRESISTIBLE PIGGIES (2002) - Directed by Lo Ken Wah. Starring Karen Mok, Michelle Reis, Kelly Lin, Jordan Chan, Suki Kwan.

The sleek and sexy Karen Mok that on display in Corey Yuen's **SO CLOSE** is nearly unrecognizable throughout most of **THE IRRESISTIBLE PIGGIES**. In fact, replace "sleek and sexy" with "repulsive and hirsute" and you have a much better description of Mok's character So Mei in this current offbeat comedy of manners, Hong Kong style.

A successful telecom firm, London Mobile Factory, is run by a nice guy and a conniving shrew. Among its dedicated employees are four not-so-attractive women known derisively as the "Pork Chops." Apparently it's not a nice thing to be called a Pork Chop in Hong Kong. Security guard Karen Mok has a hormonal imbalance (brought on by the trauma of a childhood rape attempt, no less – how's that for comedy, folks?) which causes uncontrollable hair growth and other unattractive traits – thank goodness there's Smell-O-Vision involved here. **Suki Kwan** is a secretary with narrow eyes and Halloween teeth. **Michelle Reis** is going bald and **Kelly Lin** sports a huge birthmark on her face. When the shrew boss teams up with a Caucasian playboy regional director, the girls are fired and set out to plot their revenge with the help of the flamboyantly gay designer Chun Chun (**Jordan Chan**).

In a broad sense, yes, **THE IRRESISTIBLE PIGGIES** is chock full of laughs and impeccably produced – by the notorious Wong Jing, as a matter of fact – but it's

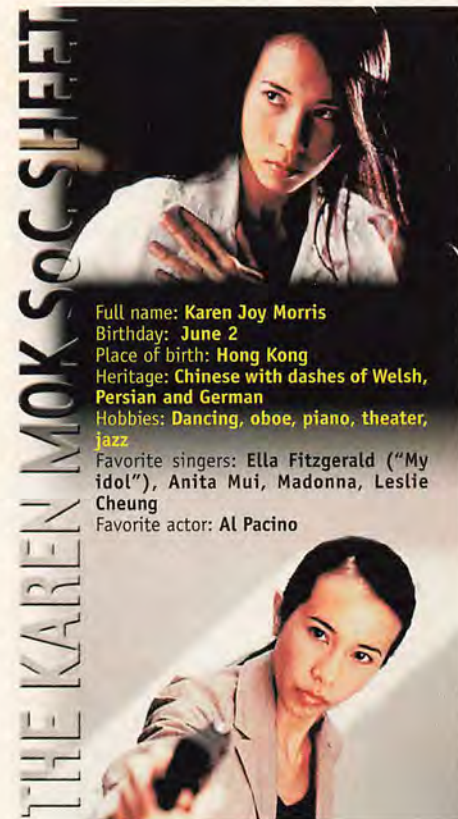
message of image being as important or perhaps more important than character seems conspicuously out of step with these so-called enlightened times. By the end of the film, all of our heroines have made that only-in-Hollywood (and Hong Kong, natch) magical transformation from beast into beauty. Despite their strength of character, none of the women is taken seriously or is accepted by those around them until they finally turn into their glamorous butterflies. The search for personal sexual identity is played for laughs when Mok's So Mei and Chan's Chun Chun develop an unlikely relationship. And we're not sure exactly how much comic gold was expected to be mined from the hormone change brought on by rape theme.

If you're open to comedy in all forms and you're not averse to stepping on the toes of the PC police, then you could find worse ways of wasting 90 minutes than to bite into these four pork chops.

Review by Kevin Collins

Filmography:

FAMILYAFFAIRS (1994)
CHINESE ODYSSEY PART 1 (1995)
CHINESE ODYSSEY PART 2 (1995)
HEAVEN CAN'T WAIT (1995)
OUT OF THE DARK (1995)
FALLEN ANGELS (1995)
SEXY AND DANGEROUS (1995)
YOUNG AND DANGEROUS (1996)
THOSE WERE THE DAYS (1996)
BEST OF THE BEST (1996)
BLACK MASTK (1996)
VIVA EROTICA (1996)
4 FACES OF EVE (1996)
THE GOD OF COOKERY (1996)
YOUNG AND DANGEROUS 4 (1997)
LAWYER, LAWYER (1997)
KITCHEN (1997)
TASK FORCE (1997)
FIRST LOVE: THE LITTER ON THE BREEZE (1997)
KING OF COMEDY (1999)
TEMPTING HEART (1999)
ROARING WHEELS (2000)
THE TEACHER WITHOUT CHALK (2000)
DRAGON HEAT (2000)
GOODBYE MR. COOL (2001)
SHAOLIN SOCCER (2001)
LA BRASSIERE (2001)
THE IRRESISTIBLE PIGGIES (2002)
HAUNTED OFFICE (2002)
SO CLOSE (2002)



Full name: **Karen Joy Morris**
 Birthday: **June 2**
 Place of birth: **Hong Kong**
 Heritage: **Chinese with dashes of Welsh, Persian and German**
 Hobbies: **Dancing, oboe, piano, theater, jazz**
 Favorite singers: **Ella Fitzgerald ("My idol"), Anita Mui, Madonna, Leslie Cheung**
 Favorite actor: **Al Pacino**

ELLEN DUBIN

MORE FOR LEXX

If you are looking for a story about despair or want to hear about the trials and tribulations of being a working actress, then stand clear from Ellen Dubin. This energetic bundle of cheer hails from the Great White North and seems as well suited to giving motivational speeches as she does to spouting cold readings in Hollywood. Always sporting her ultra-optimistic outlook on life and work, Ellen views the road ahead as just another path full of opportunities. As she hones her craft and travels down that golden path, Dubin will take the time to make new friends and enjoy every one of the adventures that life will surely place before her.

She has worked with actors from every level of the industry. A cult following sprouted up around her after appearing on the off-beat sci-fi TV show *Lexx*—where she was transformed from a wicked cannibal to a golf-playing female Pope! (We'll let Ellen explain that one to you later on.) It was a situation that may have flustered most actresses... but it was right up eternally self-assured Ellen Dubin's alley.

SIRENS OF CINEMA: Can you describe your childhood?

ELLEN DUBIN: I was born in Toronto, Canada. My childhood was a fabulous one. We went on family trips. We spent a lot of quality time together. I come from a very close-knit family that was very interested in music, theatre and film. I still talk to my parents every day.

SoC: Your mother entered you into dance because of your poor posture?

ED: Yes, that is true. I was a very shy child with bad posture and flat feet. In order for me to gain confidence and improve my back, my mother entered me in ballet class. My father would drive me to my classes.

SoC: Do you still dance?

ED: I don't take classes anymore. I did a lot of stage shows as a musical performer where I had to dance, for example, the Tony Award winning musical "A Chorus Line." I have danced in some television shows. But, I am concentrating more on the acting now. I

*Interview by
Hugh
Gallagher*

dance around my living room to relieve stress.

SoC: Were you the class clown or the home coming queen in high school?

ED: I was neither. I was the class nerd. Sweet and shy!

SoC: At what point did you decide that you were going to be an actress?

ED: I can't remember the exact moment. But I know that when I was studying ballet and we would perform in recitals at the end of the year, I would love being on the stage. My teacher would always admire the way I could make an audience laugh or move them to tears just by dancing. No words. I knew then the power that a performer has over an audience. It was very exhilarating. I loved dancing. But ballet was very hard on my body. My knees couldn't take the pain and pressure. So the logical step for me was to move into acting.

SoC: You started out in a lot of made-for-TV movies and bit parts in television shows. How easy was it to get your foot in the door?

ED: I actually started in television in a role that was very powerful. I played a teenage battered hooker in a show called *Night Heat*. I never did bit roles. Right after that I booked (as) a series regular on a show called *The Twelve Steps*, based on actual cases of people who have been through Alcoholics Anonymous. I never really got a chance to do small parts. My look is such that I have to get scenes with depth or I don't get cast. I am not an actress who blends into the furniture. I remember when I played the role of the prostitute in that show, I asked the wardrobe people to make sure my outfit looked more authentic by ripping holes in the stockings and asking the make-up and hair people to dirty my face and rough up my hair. That began my fascination with not only working from the inside out, but also adding different physical characteristics and movement to my various characters.



SoC: What was the first lesson you learned attempting to become a professional actress?

ED: Patience, perseverance and passion!

SoC: You were in a lot of lower-budgeted, straight-to-video movies in the beginning. Were you aware of the type of film you were signing up for when you took the role in *COLD SWEAT*?

ED: I pick films for the roles that I get to play. I wanted to do *COLD SWEAT* because I got the opportunity to bring a mousy, conservative character to life. I was noticed because I was dressed from head to toe. Everyone else was nude. Another reason I did the film was the opportunity to work with well-established actors like Academy Award winner (sic) Ben Cross, Henry Czerny, Dave Thomas and Adam Baldwin. The cast assembled was fabulous. I also liked working with the director Gail Harvey. I knew she would have a handle on the sexy material.

SoC: Were you around Shannon Tweed at all during the shoot?

ED: I knew Shannon Tweed because when I was a teenager we had the same agent in Toronto. I remember meeting this beautiful blonde woman at my agency and talking to her for the first time. She was warm friendly and offered good advice. Basically she told me never to take crap from anyone. I also identified with her because we are both tall women. [But I] didn't work with her in any scenes on *COLD SWEAT*.

SoC: What is your opinion of the Shannon Tweed



Ellen Dubin in the TV-movie *SEALED WITH A KISS*.

type of late-night movies?

ED: It is not my career choice. But if that works for her, more power to her.

SoC: B-movies tend to place women into two categories: sex objects or victims.

ED: I actually think that category can also be applied to A-movies.

SoC: Well, what is your opinion of that typecasting and is it easy for a woman in Hollywood to make a living as an actress avoiding those kinds of roles?

ED: Yes sometimes the material lends itself to those stereotypes. But an imaginative actress can take those types and make them her own. It can be frustrating at times. But an actress can add her own spin to these characters and wake an audience up. There is another category that can also be added to the list: the aggressive intelligent woman. I like that one. If you can combine sensuality and a sense of humor with that, then you have the whole package. That is my favorite combo platter!

SoC: What were your feelings when you saw **TAMMY AND T-REX** after it was released?

ED: I know that the film isn't a masterpiece but I had the best time making it. It was my first film in Los Angeles. It was also during the L.A. fires. So we were shooting while things were burning behind us. It was very scary and surreal. I got to meet Denise Richards and Paul Walker. It was also their first film. I loved working with **WEEKEND AT BERNIE'S** Terry Kiser. We never stopped laughing on that film. The comic moments between me and Terry Kiser still work. I had some of the craziest outfits in that movie. I don't think there has ever been a nurse who has worn such a short mini skirt!

SoC: So you worked with Denise Richards?

ED: Yes, I spent a lot of time working with Denise. We were both a bit nervous because it was the first film for each of us. Denise was sweet, adorable and fabulous. She and I would discuss the latest Hollywood diets and exercise programs. She is still a good friend. I am very proud of her success. We loved working on a comedy together.

SoC: You have been around a lot of big B and A list actors in the films you have done. Anyone make a big impression on you or give you any good advice?

ED: I have worked with some wonderful actors. I am looking forward to acting with a lot more. Most people advise to never, ever give up on your dream. Great words of wisdom. I loved working with Academy Award winning actress Olympia Dukakis on **NEVER TOO LATE**. Watching her work with such ease really made an impression on me. I also liked working with German actor Udo Kier. He is a very powerful classy actor.

SoC: I see one of the first TV shows that you were ever in, *Forever Knight*, is being resurrected on Space: The Imagination Station. What did you think of the show?

ED: *Forever Knight* has a mystique surrounding it. It is one of those shows that fans will follow till the end of time. I had one of the best experiences working on that show. I did two episodes. I still get fan mail. I am thrilled that Space is running the show again. I think the Sci-Fi Network in the U.S. is also running a *Forever Knight* marathon. I think *Forever Knight* was a very special show. I loved the whole vampire theme and how it was handled. I am still in touch with the wonderful Geraint Wynn Davies.

SoC: The show most people associate you with is Lexx. How did you get involved with that?

ED: I auditioned for the show. There was one monologue that every actress performed at that audition. I had no clue what the show was about. All I knew was that it was an off-the-wall new show. I decided to go all out at that audition. I made very strong sexy risky and risqué choices. After the initial audition, the producers had callbacks. More scenes were



Ellen as Giggerota and the Pope on Lexx.



given out and then I booked the role of Giggerota the Wicked. Then the crazy wonderful journey of Lexx began.

SoC: Were you aware when they killed off your character Giggerota the Wicked that you would be resurrected?

ED: I thought it was a one shot deal. I knew that I was going to do the first two movies of the week – "I Worship His Shadow" and "Supernova" – but never in my wildest dreams did I expect such favorable positive response to Giggerota.

SoC: How did you take to playing a cannibal?

ED: I relished the opportunity to play a sexy aggressive funny character. I didn't have to censor anything. I could be funny wild and ballsy. It is very rare that women get a chance to portray roles like that.

SoC: Relished...funny choice of word from a cannibal... You would return as Queen. Was this a nice change from Giggerota?

ED: The concept of the show was to bring Giggerota back in different bodies. So the new reincarnated



characters would have certain qualities of Giggerota but would also have their own quirks. Queen was difficult to play physically. I shot in an old fort in Berlin. I was immersed in a hot tub of water for 15 hours a day. Outside it was snowing. By the end of the shooting, I was so exhausted. I used that tiredness in my character; Queen was very deranged. I added singing of the lines to the role to relieve my exhaustion. The producers kept the repetitive singing in which contributed further to Queen's madness.

SoC: You were once again resurrected as Miami real estate broker Genevieve G. Rota, which is an obvious play on the name Giggerota. What inspired that?

ED: The producers and writers of the show started to add a few characters on Earth. They thought it would be fascinating to see what would happen if Giggerota was put on Earth in the body of a real estate agent. That 30-second cameo of G.G. Rota set up the fact that she was randomly chosen from the yellow pages to play the Pope. I feel very grateful to have been able to play all these different parts.

SoC: Can you explain how you became the first fe-

male Pope?

ED: Well, here goes... The Miami real estate agent, Genevieve G. Rota, has been randomly chosen by some cardinals in Rome to be the Pope. So she is transported into Vietnam – actually Thailand – where I, the Pope, take the leading man, (Stanley Tweedle played by Brian Downey) and the President of the United States (played by Rolf Koneikes) hostage. We spoof the classic film *APOCALYPSE NOW*. The episode is called *APOCALYXX NOW*. My Pope worships golf. So in a nutshell, I, Giggerota the Wicked who played Queen who then played G. G. Rota then played the Pope Genevieve I playing Marlon Brando as Kurtz in *APOCALYPSE NOW*. Aren't you glad you asked?

SoC: I understand you had to learn golf for that part. How did you do and do you still play?

ED: I want to learn more. I haven't had the time. I learned how to drive and hold the golf club. I looked like I knew how to swing. There are many intricacies to the game. It is like acting. The search for perfection is endless!

SoC: They flew you to Bangkok to film that part? How was that shoot?

ED: The shoot was amazing! I will never forget the crew in Thailand. They are the most generous heart-felt people. I loved their spirit and work ethic. The food was unbelievable. Very hot climate, beautiful

scenery. We shot 3 hours outside of Bangkok. I kept singing the song "One Night in Bangkok" when we first landed there. The busiest market I have ever seen...wall-to-wall people...very tactile city.

SoC: What was the best thing about working on the Lexx series?

ED: Getting the opportunity to travel to Halifax, Berlin and Thailand. I met fabulous people. I have made lifelong friends from the cast of Lexx. It was also a unique concept for a show. I am proud to be a part of a show that has become a cult classic all around the world. How many actresses get to play four different characters in the same series? I thank Paul Donovan, who created, produced, directed and wrote Lexx, from the bottom of my heart.

SoC: Any stories from the Robocop: Prime Directives?

ED: First of all, I was thrilled to be asked to be a part of a classic story. Second of all, I was doing Lexx at the time and playing a larger than life character. So the timing of the 3 Robocop movies of the week was perfect for me. The character was very real and straightforward. I modeled my character after Tommy Lee Jones in *THE FUGITIVE*. I had also never worked with bomb special effects before. It was exciting but also frightening. Everyone really had to pull their weight and be on their marks at all times to ensure proper safety. The shoot was done very quickly. Julian

Grant, the producer and director, had everything mapped out very carefully and masterfully. Because the filming of these movies was done in such a short, short time, cast and crew really had to know their craft. No time for fooling around. Almost everything was done in one take. The quickest shoot I have ever worked on. I was glad not to be in the Robocop outfit. Very uncomfortable from what I saw.

SoC: Did you shoot the pilot for a new show called Area 23?

ED: The pilot has not been shot yet. It will shoot probably in the fall in New Mexico or L.A. I am eagerly waiting to work on this. The script is wonderful and the casts are some of the hottest names in sci-fi working today. It is going to be a very special project.

SoC: Can you give any more information about what Area 23 is about?

ED: Area 23 is a fictitious government think tank program for finding alternative solutions to combating terrorism without putting masses of America fighting forces in harm's way. This is all post-September 11th. A unit of paranormal operatives – known as the Psy Ops Team, for Psychological Operations – is one of those solutions. Why put an entire company of soldiers' lives at risk when can exploit a handful of paranormals to do the same job? I play Dr. Sharda Mendez, a psychiatrist who's also a paranormal researcher. Dr. Mendez is the linchpin of Area 23, responsible for screening new recruits to determine if they are psychologically fit to participate in the Psy Ops program...or any other Area 23 project. My character also counsels members of the team as well as its administrators. That will give revelations into my personal life.

SoC: How does shooting TV shows in L.A. differ from Canada?

ED: There is no major difference in shooting anywhere. Good work is good work. Now that I have worked in the U.S., Canada, Asia and Europe, I can see that crews and casts everywhere want to get the job done quickly and produce a great show. Occasionally there are weather differences. In L.A., generally, we don't have to worry about snow and ice. So producers sometimes in Canada have to plan weather days. Some scenes are therefore rearranged for indoor shoots, and so forth. I love working everywhere. I can adapt to any country.

SoC: At what point in your career did you move to L.A. and what initiated you to do so?

ED: I decided on the spur of the moment to go to L.A. I had auditioned on tape for a miniseries that starred Robert Wagner and Donna Mills. I got the part and once I got down here to L.A., I stayed. It is a wonderful city for my business. After shooting the miniseries, I landed a major role in a play called "Tamara" in Los Angeles. It was a very unique piece where the audience follows the characters around in a house. They experience all of our desires, feelings and emotions close up. I felt ready to take on the big guns of Hollywood. It was time to expand my career.

SoC: How does general living differ? Is L.A. a harder place for a working actress?

ED: You live in your car in Los Angeles. In the trunk of my car, I sometimes have different outfits for various appointments. You keep a snack in your car. It takes a lot of time to drive everywhere. That is why talk-radio is so popular here in Los Angeles. It is harder because there are so many more actors here. Everyone comes from every city in the world. L.A. is the center of the entertainment business. That is the appeal though. There is something to aspire to. The brass ring is huge!

SoC: Your most recent show was the mini-series *A Wrinkle In Time* for Disney. What did you have to go through to play Aunt Beast? How many hours were you in makeup?

ED: I would say the kind and compassionate Aunt Beast was the biggest physical challenge of my ca-



reer. I spent 5 to 6 hours a day in makeup, covered in heavy prosthetics glued to my face, then hair on top of the rubber latex and entire body. I wore two fat suits that added a hundred pounds to my figure. I sported two sets of arms and I was blind. I had a huge hairy belly and posterior. I had an amazing special effects team of about five people. All I had was the use of my body and voice. That is where my dance and singing training came in handy. Some of the funny moments were when I was eating. I would get bread or fruit stuck in my beard. I had to eat with a mirror so I could watch the food go into my mouth. Going to the bathroom was a major ordeal. It took two women to get me out of my suits. It was so hot that during breaks, I sat in a cold storage room with a tube of air conditioning jutting out of my stomach and an ice pack on my head and back of my neck. I will always appreciate what an actor goes through when they do a prosthetics role and the many hours of work that the special effects team puts in. I looked like a character from **PLANET OF THE APES** – but bigger and hairier. I couldn't see except for tiny slits in between my hair-covered eyes. My feet were huge and hairy and I kept bumping into people and tripping. I was hilarious to look at.

SoC: Where was it filmed?

ED: It was filmed in Vancouver.

SoC: Was it a long shoot?

ED: My scenes were shot at a soundstage. The shoot was a few weeks. The days were 17 hours long. It was a challenge.

SoC: Were you able to get your foot in the door with any other Disney or Miramax projects?

ED: It is still too soon to say that. *A Wrinkle in Time* hasn't aired yet. I hear they are very pleased with my work though. Would love to work for both companies. Their projects are very classy and well received. They are both the crème de la crème.

SoC: You have been actively involved in many independent Canadian films. What are your views on the



Ellen takes a rest on the set of *A WRINKLE IN TIME*.

whole independent market?

ED: I love the chance to work in an independent film. It usually means more time to work on the acting and more time to play. A lot of passion goes into these films. I am a firm supporter of the independent market. Hope to continue to work on many of these films.

SoC: Can you tell us about your involvement with the British comic cum animation series, *Nature's Guard*?

ED: *Nature's Guard* is the epic story of Good versus Evil on the distant world of Forestya, as the heroic forces of the *Nature's Guard* battle the evil terrorists known as the Spider Sect Empire. According to the producer and creator, Jonathan Bryans, if *Nature's*

Guard is turned into a feature film – which is his long term plan – I will be playing the role of Empress Webula. I will be voicing the animated character with my own voice for the animation series. The producer has indicated that he takes a lot of time analysing his choices before he picks a voice actor. Since he has hopes of turning *Nature's Guard* into a movie, therefore, the voice actor must fit the character as much in voice as in looks and mannerisms. I have the honor of being picked to be Empress Webula.

SoC: Do you have any aspirations beyond acting in the movies? Writing, directing, producing?

ED: I would love to produce a film and put all my hard-working friends in it. I am working on that right now.

SoC: What is your ultimate goal?

ED: To continue to learn and grow as a human being and an artist. Love my family and friends. Try different foods of the world and travel. There is so much to do and see in life!

SoC: Landing roles in major projects is anything but easy. Do you associate your success with luck, talent, persistence or what?

ED: I associate it with a lot of hard, hard work, dedication and a streak of craziness. You have to be a little bent to be rejected almost every day of your life. You must be thick-skinned to accept the rejection but when you perform you have to have that vulnerability that makes an actor or actress special. I also think the most important thing is to have a sense of humor. Humor is the key!

If any fan wishes to make contact with Ellen Dubin, they may do so by contacting her through her publicist Bill Wanstrom via e-mail at ed_wanstromassoc@hotmail.com.

(For more information about *Area 23*, check their website link: www.area23movie.com)

VISIBLE SECRET II cont...

in a horror movie. Jack and September shadow Ching's every move and turn up diabolical hints and clues but little in the way of cold hard facts. The more Jack uncovers, the eerier the evidence seems. Every clue only seems to lead to more unsettling questions... Could Ching really be a murderer? Could Ching really be a ghost? If there is a ghost, is it after Ching or Jack? What of the pervert that lives in their apartment building and videotapes his neighbors? Just who are the two women in the apartment across the courtyard who seem to be there one moment and not the next? Who or what is the creepy old lady who's always sitting on the bench outside Jack's window? And just why has September returned just now, just in time for all the ghoulish goings-on?

Eason Chan and Jo Kuk (aka Jo Koo) are plausibly terrific in the leads as Jack and Ching. Eason pulls off the harried-everyman-facing-Armageddon with seasoned aplomb. If Hitchcock was Chinese and living in the 2000s, Eason could be Hong Kong's answer to Jimmy Stewart. Hobbled by his bum leg and the disbelief of nearly everyone around him, Chan's Jack is forced to rely unquestionably on that one mysterious hot mama who just may or

may not be everything she claims to be.

Kuk is undeniable spooky as Ching. Her long pale expressionless face is the perfect palette on which to create a ghost. Kuk manages to pull off both the effective wisdom of the perfect wife and the disquieting heebie-jeebies as the ghoul of Jack's dreams. As with the promo campaign for the original **VISIBLE SECRET**, Kuk's otherworldly incarnation as the period-garbed pale-faced poltergeist is featured prominently in the **VISIBLE SECRET II**'s teasers, trailers and overall ad campaign – now riding buses and escalators instead of subways. The difference in this obliquely tangent sequel, however, is that her ghoul actually makes it into the movie itself this time.

As the girl in the background holding more cards than she's capable of showing, Cherrie Ying is a triumphant revelation as sweet September. Fragile as the crisp beautiful leaves that delicately glide to their fatal destiny every autumn, September's infectious smile and sense of hope may in reality be the gateway to something inviting. Ying is expertly cast in this key role and plays it straight and narrow right up until her true place in Jack's life is revealed. Trust us, you won't see September's highly visible

secret coming.

Having flashed brilliance in one genre or another in each of her previous films, here Cherrie finally has the opportunity to bring it all together in a role that will have you laughing, scratching your head, guessing along with her and, yes, crying. If this tour-de-force doesn't rate at least a best supporting nomination for next year's Hong Kong Film Awards, then there's something rotten in Denmark...if you catch our drift.

There's no claim here that **VISIBLE SECRET II** is completely original in any way shape or form. But don't hold that against it. It's definitely a throwback to the golden days of American ghost stories when tension and suspense ruled the roost and visual effects were carefully placed hints and accents instead of the whole story. And, true, the story is a bit derivative of some recent Western horror fare, except that Abe Kwong has crafted his copy into 90 minutes of thrills instead of churning out a copycat hour and a half of blood and guts. Quality acting and substance deftly move the story from start to finish and there's never the slightest sensation of being manipulated by the storytellers...though, in fact, you most definitely are.

On a variety of levels **VISIBLE SE-**

CRET II works. And it holds up to multiple viewers. In the spirit of the best gumshoe dramas and Italian *giallos* of days past, you'll just have to go back to try to discover how the heart of the story was there hiding all the time in plain sight.

If you want to revisit those days when a movie could truly frighten you and if you want a melancholy story that meanders skillfully and knowingly on a dark mature level at all times, **VISIBLE SECRET II** is tailor made to curl up with on a chilly autumn night with the cool winds blowing in your window and with stirring leaves wafting up against your door. So get up and lock the door and close the window! There's a ghost out there!

RATING: 8 out of 10 SoCs :

DVD available through Sirens of Cinema mail order and at www.SirensOfCinema.com. A Tai Seng DVD All-region NTSC Dolby Digital DTS release.

Special notes: **VISIBLE SECRET II** gets high praise for its inventive DVD menu and overall presentation with plenty of Cantonese extras. If you want to spend some real spooky time in front of your PC, point your URL to <http://www.visiblesecret2.com/> to point and click at your own risk.

Reviewed by Kevin Collins

SARAH MICHELLE GELLAR

MOVIE CHECKLIST

by Hugh Gallagher



FUTURE PROJECTS:

A SEMESTER ABROAD: A comedy revolving around a hard-living girl from Queens who enters a scholarship to study in a snobbish British school. Production dates unknown.

SCOOBY TOO: After the mega-bucks earned with the live version of popular cartoon *Scooby-Doo*, Warner Brothers was quick to sign on the original cast, which includes Sarah Michelle Gellar and her new husband Freddie Prinze Jr., to do it again. Hopefully this time they will get it right. To be released in 2004.

THE IT GIRL: Was slated to start production in June 2000. The story of a young girl that moves to New York and manages to endear herself to high society and falls in love with a prosperous bachelor. The status of this movie is currently unknown.

HAPPILY N'EVER AFTER: An animated comedy about the necessary balance of Good and Evil which will feature the voices of Sarah Michelle Gellar and Freddie Prinze Jr. as the main characters. **Sigourney Weaver** will supply the voice for the wicked stepmother. To be released in 2003.

Whenever Sarah Michelle Gellar's name is mentioned one mentally references an agile blonde in fierce battle with vampires. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* has developed a strong fan base that watches intently as the beautiful Buffy, superbly portrayed by Gellar, interweaves within a supernatural world every week on our TV sets. But, is there life after *Buffy*? This burning question may be put the test as rumors have it that the 7th season (which debuted on September 24) may be the last one for Sarah Michelle. Gellar told the press, "It's important for me to go out on top. I don't want to be part of a show that runs eight years only to have people say of it, 'That should have ended years ago.'"

Will this be the final year? Producers of the show are uncertain if the show will end even if Sarah decides not to sign a new contract. There have been talks of Buffy's teenage sister Dawn, played by Michelle Trachtenberg, taking the role as head vampire slayer. While TV execs battle with the important decisions to be made, Sarah Michelle contemplates a new career... a full time career in movies.

Born April 14, 1977, Sarah's acting career started in New York at the tender age of 4 when an agent discovered her while she was eating in a restaurant. Her first job was in a made-for-TV movie with Valerie Harper called **AN INVASION OF PRIVACY**. An array of TV commercials ensued, including a groundbreaking controversial 1982 Burger King spot that had a young Gellar creating a debate about the size of hamburgers. By uttering her notorious "I only eat at Burger King" line - and the claim that McDonald's burgers were smaller than Burger King's - she ruffled the feathers of the McLawyers. This was the first time that a commercial had ever mentioned a competitor by name. Both the advertisers and Gellar, only 5-years old at the time, were sued. Afterwards, Gellar, saddled by truth in advertising constraints, wasn't even allowed to enter a McDonald's - lest her commercial claim be seen as a legal whopper. But, our ambitious Sarah was determined to have it her way, so it would take more than litigation to slow down this little dynamo.

She continued to play small parts in films, plays and TV - even playing the distinguished **Jacqueline Bouvier** as a teen in the TV mini-series *A Woman Named Jackie*. It was her talent and perseverance that landed her the role of Kendall Hart on the popular soap opera *All My Children* in 1993. After just a little over two years on the show she walked away armed with an Emmy and out to conquer Hollywood, ignoring the warnings thrown up by her fellow actors who claimed that actors who leave soaps do not get jobs. Sarah drove a stake through the heart of those arguments by landing the lead in *Buffy*.

Sarah's personal life stays pretty much that - personal. She shows great affection for her mother Rosellen, crediting her for everything good that has happened in her life. She is the complete opposite with her father, Arthur, who divorced Rosellen in 1984. Sarah told TV Guide, "He is not a person who exists in my life. Just because you donate sperm does not make you a father. I don't have a father." Arthur was found dead of an apparent drug overdose in October 2001. He was going through cancer treatments and suffered from depression. Publicly, Gellar displayed no emotions after his death and has kept whatever personal turmoil she harbors towards him private, never washing her family laundry in public.

But Sarah has not carried her ill feelings toward her father over into her own love life. Long rumored in the tabloids, Sarah's affections finally made real headlines this September 3rd when she tied the knot with longtime beau and fellow actor **Freddie Prinze Jr.** The two met when they co-starred in the hit film **I KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER**. Their friendship continued to blossom and they became a couple a few years later and have proven completely inseparable.

As Sarah looks more seriously to expanding her film résumé, we at *Sirens of Cinema* felt it was time just to investigate just what Sarah Michelle Gellar had to offer to us in the way of feature films. Forget the small screen, it is time to experience the other side of Buffy, a 5' 3" natural brunette who enjoys *Tae Kwon Do*, rollerblading, and keeping busy. Deemed a workaholic, Gellar sometimes receives the rap of a diva, a term often wrongly confused with a woman who knows what she wants and isn't afraid to express it. Will this willful Sarah Michelle Gellar make an easy transition from TV to the big screen? When looking over her feature film accomplishments to date, one has to say that her acting talent will not hinder her, but her selection of scripts may. Hopefully she will exercise a little more astuteness in future decisions because her batting average so far has been less than Hall of Fame caliber. Obviously a beautiful and talented person, let's hope that, as she adds to her movie roster, the films themselves match the talent she has to offer.



SCOOBY-DOO (2002 - Directed by Raja Gosnell)

The idea of turning the popular *Scooby-Doo* cartoon into a live-action movie seems to be more of a marketing

ploy than the brainstorm of an overzealous fan. Instead of spending time figuring out how to properly bring this animated character to life (or why they should bring this animated character to life), the bean counters were more worried about movie tie-ins and marketing ploys than the end result. Kid movies are saturated with more commercialism than any other type of movie – can one even be made anymore without some fast food sponsor? It doesn't seem possible.

The movie revolves around a group known as Mystery Inc., four teenagers (?) that go around solving mysteries for bewildered clients. Despite their many years together this mini-organization looks destined to dissolve due to personality clashes. Fred (Freddie Prinze Jr.), the head of the group, always wants to take the credit for everything whether he deserves it or not. Daphne (Sarah Michelle Gellar) is tired of being considered the damsel in distress and claims she can take care of herself and is ready to forge out on her own. Velma (Linda Cardellini) is the real brains of the operation but feels like she never gets her just recognition. Shaggy (Matthew Lillard), a carefree beatnik, seems to be the only one not up in arms. He enjoys unhealthy food and the company of his best pal, a giant Great Dane named Scooby-Doo. Shaggy tries to keep the group together, but it proves fruitless.

The story jumps ahead two years and we find the entire crew unknowingly being reunited to solve a mystery at a

place called Spooky Island, a popular theme park for college kids ran by owner Mondavarius (Rowan Atkinson) who is concerned because his guests show up to his island ready to party but leave in a zombie like fashion. Although the foursome attempts to tackle the mystery individually, they must one again pull together as a team to try and find out what is happening. After the discovery a master plan involving soul swapping by a very unlikely accomplice, the results end in something that even the cartoon version would classify as too ridiculous to believe.

Bringing cartoon characters to life is no simple task, and the producers of **SCOOBY-DOO** were only somewhat up to the chore. Let's face it, dark skinned/dark haired people tend look bad if they try and go blonde, such is the case with Freddie Prinze Jr. He looks ghastly playing the blonde Fred, regrettably representing more of what a deceased Freddie Prinze Jr. would look like than the cartoon character he is trying to resemble. Linda Cardellini does a good job with Velma matching the look pretty well, although she is much cuter than the comic character and her low-cut blouse towards the end of the movie is a bit jump from the turtle neck sweaters her prudish character is associated with... not that we are complaining! Special kudos goes to Matthew Lillard as Shaggy – he is what Shaggy would be if he came to life. Voice, actions, look – Matthew has his part nailed to the wall and one could easily say he stole the show with his performance. The onscreen entity of Scooby-Doo is kind of scary mostly because cartoon-to-live-action was just not possible without computer assistance, the final result producing a Scooby that lacked the goofy appeal of the cartoon character and appeared more like a ghoulish canine than anything else. Although the animated character is fun, it never captures the true Scooby-Doo that fans of the cartoon have grown to love.

Sarah Michelle Gellar as Daphne was almost as much of a miscast as her then fiancé. Not that she looks bad in the part or does a bad job, but she doesn't capture the look or feel of the cartoon character... but this doesn't mean she is bad to look at. Sarah gets an opportunity to show off her karate skills in the film, and for our enjoyment, she is decked out in a short purple mini skirt with go-go boots. Although it must have been considered a casting coup to put Sarah and Freddy in these roles, if they were trying to capture the true essence of the cartoon, different actors should have played both Fred and Daphne. But apparently the teenagers of the world didn't agree with us as Gellar was not only given the 2002 Teen Choice Award



Fred (Freddie Prinze Jr.), Velma (Linda Cardellini), Shaggy (Matthew Lillard) and Daphne (Sarah Michelle Gellar).

for Choice TV Actress Drama for *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, but also the Choice Movie Actress Comedy for **SCOOBY-DOO**.

It is surprising that Gellar took the role at all because she really put her head on the block when – pre-casting – she spoke to *Seventeen* magazine about the part, “When doing a film such as *HARVARD MAN*, with that high of content and level, I doubt any actor would then stoop to do a Disney genre-type movie. Freddie has signed on to it, but I haven't even looked over the script.” The reason for the sudden change of mind is anyone's guess although she claims that she took the role because, “For me, *SCOOBY DOO* was a chance to do something fun for a change.” Gellar clarified, “I had a chance to spend a few months in Sydney, Australia which is one of the most beautiful cities in the world, and I was working with the man in my life. So I wasn't even looking at it from any career management perspective even though it certainly has the potential to draw a huge audience. Playing Daphne was also a chance for me to do comedy and take a break from my more serious *Buffy* frame of mind.” Her change of heart may have had something to do with the willingness of the production company to work around her *Buffy* schedule, spending quality time with her fiancé in Australia while filming, plus the rumored \$2 million she received for her participation.

SCOOBY DOO's lack of wide appeal may have been related to its inability to make a commitment to a particular audience, not knowing if it wanted to be family orientated or a little more hip. Scenes of Velma showing gay tendencies were cut from the film and a scene where Daphne and Velma kiss was also relegated to the cutting room floor. “We did kiss – it got cut,” Gellar told *TV Guide*, “We hope they'll add it in the DVD. Initially, in the soul-swapping scene, Velma and Daphne couldn't seem to get their souls back, and so

the way they found was to kiss, and their souls went back into their own bodies.” Even with the more risqué scenes stricken from the print, the movie still skirts on a potential R-rating with the spring break type parties on the island, alcohol, and that touchy issue of why Shaggy always has the munchies. The release print luckily managed to snag a PG-13 however.

Despite many negative reviews the producers already signed on for a sequel after the movie generated over \$54 million on its opening weekend. The movie, currently titled **SCOOBY TOO**, is to start shooting in the summer of 2004 once again reuniting the original cast. Hopefully this time they will decide if they want to make a kids film or an adult comedy... or maybe get an original idea and drop the thought of bringing this cartoon to life and do something completely innovative.



HARVARD MAN (2001 - Directed by James Toback)

Buffy fans might be a little shocked to see their idol kick off *HARVARD MAN* groaning in ecstasy while having sex with her boyfriend. But they will soon get over the surprise as this absurd tale unravels.

Cindy (Sarah Michelle Gellar) is a cheerleader whose boyfriend, Alan (Adrian Grenier) is a point guard on the Harvard basketball team. He is a philosophy major that is out to find the true meaning of life by taking sex and drugs to the limit. Beyond his sexual rendezvous with Cindy, he is also dishing his philosophy professor Chesney (Joey Lauren Adams).

Alan's life takes a radical turn when his parents' home is destroyed by a tornado back in Kansas. When he finds out that they have no tornado insurance (not a wise choice living in a state notoriously known as “tornado alley”) he sets out to raise \$100,000





Rebecca Gayheart and Sarah Michelle Gellar in *HARVARD MAN*.

for them to buy them another house. He turns to Cindy, whose father Andrew Bandolini (**Gianni Russo**) is a gangster with some big bucks. The two indirectly strike a deal through Cindy for him to throw a basketball game against Dartmouth after which he will be paid \$100,000.

Alan succeeds in getting the money but things go awry when it turns out that two people in the Bandolini organization are actually FBI agents who are looking to take down the entire outfit. They attempt to use Cindy and Alan to help prosecute him. Cindy fights against the idea of testifying against her father and searches out Alan to do the same. But Alan, who went to deliver the money to his parents, decides to drop some LSD on the plane trip home. He now must deal with his hallucinations as the FBI comes after him while Cindy and Chesney try and reason with him.

This movie could not be more idiotic – a point underscored by its zero character buildup. Alan's father seems to hate him when he tries to come to the parents' aid – which makes one wonder why he would risk everything to save these people. Maybe if they done something (anything) in this film to build their relationship it would

have been more believable, but as it is it just seems like a convenient plot device to make Alan need to raise \$100,000. Andrew Bandolini's two "hit-men" are out to get Alan, but their only purpose (we assume) is to be the comedy relief of this lifeless film. These guys resemble rejects from a Three Stooges remake more than anything, the only thing funny is how these guys ever got hired as actors. And let's not forget Chesney the college professor who loves sex! Her exaggerated **Jennifer Tilly** voice is about all one can stand to listen to as she analyzes everything while having sexual romps every night – which in the end actually saves Alan from persecution. (Yes, the ending is as stupid and as far-fetched as the rest of the film.) Alan's basketball teammate Marcus (**Ray Allen**) displays about as much emotion as someone reading the ingredients off of a cereal box!

And let's not forget our star Adrian Grenier. Someone should have explained why this charm-impaired guy was such a sex magnet and how a 5' 10" guy became a basketball star. His deadpan acting goes hand in hand with this completely pointless script, which appears to have been written on the fly... or at least one hopes so since it would be really embarrassing to think anyone spent any real time constructing this inane story.

Gellar almost seems to be simply walking through the production. Her acting range stays on the same plane but, given the script, there was never any point at which it could rise to any other level. Although Sarah looks fine in the film, her controversial sex scenes come across as anything but erotic. Maybe the fact that Alan talks through most of the sex had something to do with it. For a movie so heavily laden with sexual innuendos this could possibly be the most unerotic film ever made.

Director/writer **Jim Toback** (**BLACK & WHITE, TWO GIRLS AND A GUY**) supposedly based the movie on an 8-

day LSD trip he had back in college. We get to see what he saw through Alan's eyes, basically faces that distort and pulse along with a collection of voices ringing in our ears. This is effective when we first experience it but having to endure every time Alan is in a scene just makes you want to pop a couple downers to come off of this high...and hopefully go to sleep so you won't have to sit through the rest of this pointless drivel.

There has been a lot of praise put on the fact that **HARVARD MAN** was shot in less than 3 weeks. This may have been its downfall, not letting the actors properly get into character and do some acting instead of trying to see how much of the script they could memorize and spew out without a mistake. Sarah told *Entertainment Online*, "We shot this entire movie in 20 days. I have only been here for about 10. I go home and do *Buffy* for a week. Then, I fly back on the weekend and do *Harvard Man*... *James* is very fast. There are no retakes. That has been an incredible amount of pressure for every actor. Everyone has to be right on...It was incredible stress."

It was reported in *TV Guide Online* that Gellar came onto the set of **HARVARD MAN** one day in a foul mood. With boyfriend Freddie Prinze Jr. in tow she allegedly grouched, "I missed the Pitt/Aniston wedding for this?" It was reported that Gellar did the movie for 1/13 of her asking price.

HARVARD MAN saw very limited theatrical release and comes out on video late October. If you are a doper looking to compare drug-induced experiences, **HARVARD MAN** may be for you, all others should look for a higher form of education.



CRUEL INTENTIONS (1999 – Directed by Roger Kumble)

Easily one of Sarah Michelle Gellar's most memorable feature film roles. Even though the producers of the film were not too sure that Sarah could make the transformation from Buffy to the truly evil character Kathryn Merteuil. "I found this script on my own but it was very, very early into my film career," Gellar told *EON* magazine. "I had just got back from filming *SCREAM 2* and I fell in love with this script. It was a \$2 million movie at the time but I didn't care so I met Roger [Kumble] one morning at eight and told him I had to do this. Another producer came aboard (**Neal Moritz**) and I wasn't sure if that was a good thing or a bad thing – 'does this mean I'm going to get it or I'm not going to get it.'" Moritz, who also produced another Gellar film, **I KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER**, was in agreement with



Ryan Phillippe, Sarah Michelle Gellar, Reese Witherspoon, Selma Blair in *CRUEL INTENTIONS*.

director Kumble to take the chance and sign the young actress on, despite the fact that it seemed the complete opposite of the kind of role Gellar would normally play. The budget rose to \$10 million dollars, Gellar receiving \$500,000 of that for her participation.

A modern day telling of "Dangerous Liaisons," Sebastian Valmont (**Ryan Phillippe**) is an arrogant rich kid who has everything he could ever want... and that bores him. For entertainment he takes great joys out of humiliating and destroying other peoples lives by playing with their minds. He seduces young girls, takes advantages of them, and then demeans them in some fashion with great amusement, keeping a journal of his conquests. But, Sebastian has become uninterested in his easy rich debutant prey and decides to go for bigger fish. After reading an article in *Seventeen* magazine written by Annette Hargrove (Reese Witherspoon) concerning her stance against premarital sex, Sebastian has found the ultimate victim. He sets out to deflower the righteous virgin, who so happens to be the daughter of their schools new headmaster.

Sebastian's stepsister, Kathryn (Sarah Michelle Gellar), is equally wicked. She spends her days lounging around their lavish Manhattan penthouse dressed in the finest clothing while sniffing cocaine that is cleverly hidden in her crucifix necklace. She, too, has a mission of revenge after her boyfriend dumps her for the naïve Cecile (**Selma Blair**). Kathryn decides to take Cecile under her wing to supposedly prepare her for their private school and enlists Sebastian's help in destroying Cecile's life.

To make the tale a bit more interesting there is the underlying desire of Sebastian to be with Kathryn, who continually arouses the young man with her sexual teasing, with never any intention of giving him what he wants... that is until they make the bet. Kathryn doesn't believe that Sebastian will successfully bed down



HARVARD MAN



Sarah as the sexy and evil Kathryn Merteuil in *CRUEL INTENTIONS*.

the virginal Annette and wages that if he loses she gets to take possession of his classic Jaguar Roadster. If he succeeds he can have his way with her telling him, "You can put it anywhere." The bet is made and may the evildest one win.

As Sebastian makes his moves on Annette, Kathryn is out to destroy Cecile's life. She attempts to destroy her reputation by telling her that she should get experience by sleeping around. She then gives her a seductive lesson in kissing before she turns her over to Sebastian who has his way with her. When Kathryn finds out about the secret flirting going on between Cecile and her black Cello teacher Ronald (Sean Patrick Thomas), she decides to sell her out to Cecile's mother but making photocopies of love letters Ronald has sent Cecile.

Meanwhile, it takes some time for Sebastian to break down Annette's defenses, but in the end she does sleep with him. Unfortunately, for Sebastian, he has developed real feelings for Annette and wants to stay with her, but he has his reputation as a cad to defend, as well as the wrath of his sister. He must now make a decision that may not only destroy someone else's life, but his own as well.

It is impossible for **CRUEL INTENTIONS** not to stir up some emotions

in anyone that watches it. Both Sebastian and Kathryn's lack of respect for anyone is about all anyone can sit through. Can two people be so callous and cold? Both Ryan and Sarah do a fantastic job in creating these evil characters. Sarah acts against the grain in which you truly hate her from the beginning right up to the end. *Buffy* lovers were in shock at the complete about turn she took playing this part and successfully pulling it off, and dropped jaws had to be apparent in many scenes. Not many were prepared to hear Buffy Summers scream, "I wanna fuck!"

But while one can appreciate the majority of the acting, the lavish sets and the true aristocratic feel of this production, it does have its flaws. Sebastian is a total creep throughout the majority of the movie but when he finally falls for Annette he does a 180 and becomes a man in love. Suddenly, we are supposed to feel sorry for him. How does one act of compassion justify a lifetime of evil? Much like a person who spends his life raping and killing but then finds God in his prison cell – so now he is a great person? Now we should feel sorry for him? Maybe had they placed some isolated moments in the beginning of the story to show Sebastian having any sense of compassion then we could have bought his convenient transfor-

mation. But, as it stands, it is impossible for most viewers to make the quick transformation that Sebastian does.

Another complaint would be Selma Blair's Cecile. Can anyone truly be this stupid? She plays the innocent ditz that is more than willing to jump into bed with someone at the slightest coaxing. She's ridiculed, talked down to, and even pushed out of bed onto the floor by Sebastian when he tires of her attention. She takes a lot of abuse and it is hard to believe anyone could be that stupid to take such humiliation and continually crawl back into these obvious traps. Had they made her play the part as an insecure or scarred person, it would have been much better. As it is, she just looks like an idiot.

Some may also have trouble with the racial slant used to blackmail Cecile, even though this created some of the best jokes in the film. When Cecile's mother approaches Ronald and screams, "How dare you treat me with such disrespect? I got you off the streets and this is how you repay me?" To which Ronald replies, "Got me off the streets? I live on 59th and Park!"

The big draw to **CRUEL INTENTIONS** was Sarah Michelle Gellar's character. Sarah is capable of arousing the most stoic of viewers with her come-hither gestures and bedroom eyes, doing so without ever revealing any skin. Her scene with Selma Blair in which she teaches her how to kiss was an erotic news magnet and is sure to be what parked a lot of viewers in their sweaty seats. "During the whole movie everyone kept teasing us and Selma and I were trying to be professional." Sarah told the press about the scene. "We got to Central Park and there were about 300 people there and Selma and I basically broke down in tears. The kiss was interesting. We had to kiss for six hours. I had the best fun doing that movie we put a lot out there doing that kiss and the award means a lot." The award in question, of course, was not from the Academy, it was the MTV Movie Award for Best Kiss. Adding additional MTV luster, she also copped their award for Best Female Performance.

Director/writer Roger Kumble attempted to keep the **CRUEL INTENTIONS** story going on by launching a TV show called *Manchester Prep*, utilizing a new cast playing the same characters with the story set up as a prequel to the movie. Due to be in the Fox late 1999 lineup, the series was yanked before the pilot even aired. Reportedly, one of the Fox executives was enraged when the character Cherie had an orgasm while riding a horse. Additional footage was shot, including some nudity, and the movie went straight to video as **CRUEL INTENTIONS 2**.



SIMPLY IRRESISTIBLE (1999 – Directed by Mark Tarlov, aka VANILLA FOG)

Sarah Michelle Gellar's fan base grew in leaps and bounds due to her appearances in the 1997 films **I KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER** and **SCREAM 2** and, more importantly, her starring role on *Buffy*. It was inevitable that someone would want to cash in on her success by placing her in a lead role in a motion picture. "That was really hard for me," Sarah told *E! Online* about her first starring feature film **SIMPLY IRRESISTIBLE**. "I read a script that I fell in love with and learned a very hard lesson—that it doesn't always work out. I've always wondered why good actors did bad movies. I'd think, didn't they read the script? Didn't they know? Now I understand what happens. Whether it's the direction or the production or some of the acting, it can change in the transition from the script you first read."

Sarah plays Amanda Shelton, a would-be chef who is struggling to keep her dearly departed mother's small restaurant open. But she has run into one major obstacle that makes a good restaurant flourish: she can't cook. While visiting an outdoor market she runs into a quirky guy named Gene (Christopher Durang) who is selling a basket of crabs and he talks Amanda into buying them. When one of the crabs attempts to scurry to freedom, she finds herself on her hands and knees trying to catch the pinching nuisance... which brings her into the presence of Tom Bartlett (Sean Patrick Flanery), a young entrepreneur who operates a department store that happens to be preparing to launch a lavish restaurant inside. The two exchange looks and niceties but go their separate ways.

As Amanda comes to grips with losing her restaurant, Tom is coincidentally delivered to Amanda's eatery – by the same guy who was selling the crabs, but who's now driving a taxi – along with his wannabe fiancée Chris (Amanda Peet). He recognizes Amanda and convinces Chris to go in for a bite to eat. Amanda sets out to make some lavish dishes, and suddenly, under the watchful eye of the crab that is now parked on a shelf in the kitchen, she conjures up fare that is not only delectable but also filled with emotion. After a few imperfect tastes Chris begins hurling dishes around the bistro and tells Tom that she has no idea why she is with him and dumps him on the spot. Tom, all this while, is so engrossed in his meal it is almost all he can do to pull himself away from Amanda and her establishment. When he leaves he tells her to come to his



The controversial kiss between Selma Blair and Sara Michelle Gellar in *CRUEL INTENTIONS*.

store and he will replace her broken dishes.

Amanda's tiny restaurant becomes highly successful, as she is now an extraordinary cook. But she cannot quit thinking about Tom and decides to go see him about more dishes and gives him a present, a scrumptious pastry that sexually stimulates anyone that eats it. Tom is now infatuated with Amanda, but he's very skeptical about getting into a serious relationship. He continues to pursue her but gets spooked when they kiss in her kitchen and find themselves floating on a vanilla fog. A skittish Tom breaks off the relationship fearing that Amanda is a witch. A twist of fate brings them back together when his highly acclaimed French chef refuses to work at the grand opening of Tom's restaurant because he doesn't have his own personal knives from France. According to the script, Amanda is naturally the only logical choice to take his place. This sets up a climatic conclusion for both Tom and the patrons of the bistro, who go through a range of emotions with each course of Amanda's meal they ingest.

Although rated PG-13, you would swear this film was a TV movie of the week with its canned elevator music, hokey storyline, cheap look and sub par acting across the board. It is never explained why this crab, that is continually seen throughout the movie looking down on the goings on, has any power. Is it the spirit of Amanda's dead mother? Is it the power of love? One usually doesn't associate crabs with anything good in the love department – quite the opposite, actually. And what happened to the guy that sold her the crabs? He magically appears as a cab driver to drive both Tom and Chris to Amanda's restaurant, but he must of picked up a fare to the Bronx right after because he is never seen again.

Sean Patrick Flanery (*Adventures of the Young Indiana Jones*) is no *Cary Grant*. As he delivers his dialogue your eyes scan the screen for something else to watch. He finds himself out-acted even by the annoying pointless crab. Sarah Michelle Gellar's acting isn't much better but at least she is more fun to look at... which may be the only selling point of this film. Sometimes Gellar looks at the camera

as if she is looking for a way out, wondering how she even got in there. "I think we did some pretty nice work in it but, unfortunately, it didn't turn out to be the movie we set out to make," Gellar told the press. "It was hard for me, but I learned a lesson early and, hopefully, it didn't do me too much damage." **SIMPLY IRRESISTABLE** did only \$4 million at the box office. Luckily for Sarah, more hype was focused on the release of **CRUEL INTENTIONS** and this forgettable film was pretty much that – forgotten.



SHE'S ALL THAT (1999 – Directed by Robert Iscove)

Freddie Prinze Jr. plays Zach Siler, captain of the soccer team, class president and all around cool guy. When his equally popular girlfriend Taylor (Jodi Lyn O'Keefe) dumps him for some jerk named Brock (Matthew Lillard, the guy that would go on to play Shaggy in the *SCOOBY-DOO* movie) – a guy who just made his fame appearing on a fictionalized version of MTV's *Real World* – Zach is knocked off his throne. To regain his almighty stature he makes a bet with his friends that he can take any girl and make her into the next prom queen, a title that his stuck-up ex-girlfriend expects to win hands down. The wager is placed and Zach must now take art-class geek, Laney Boggs (**Rachael Leigh Cook**) and turn her into the girl to replace Taylor, and take her position as prom queen.

This story has been told many times before and **SHE'S ALL THAT** is no better or worse than the rest of them. It's typical teenage comedy though reminiscent of the *Three Stooges* episode where the wealthy men make a bet that the one cannot transform *Moe, Larry and Curly* into high-society gents. **SHE'S ALL THAT** is in the same vein, though lacking even similar inspiration or the requisite pie fight at the end.

Sarah Michelle Gellar has a "blink and you'll miss her" cameo sitting at a table in the cafeteria when Laney's dense brother roller skates up to her to see if she wants ground pepper (?). Sarah waves him off and gives him a plate of pizza to take away. This brief walk-on (sit-on?) may be due to the fact that the movie was shot at the same school that *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* was being filmed at – though her developing relationship with star Freddie Prinze Jr. may have had something to do with it too.

SMALL SOLDIERS (1998 – Directed by Joe Dante)

The story of toy soldiers accidentally brought to life to terrorize a small town (see complete review in *Sirens*

of Cinema #3: Kirsten Dunst Movie Checklist). Along with **Christina Ricci**, Sarah Michelle Gellar supplies voices for the demented "Gwendy" dolls that attack star **Kirsten Dunst**.



SCREAM 2 (1997 – Directed by Wes Craven)

Only one day after stepping off her previous film **I KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER**, Sarah Michelle Gellar began work on **SCREAM 2**. This, in conjunction with shooting *Buffy*, didn't seem to faze the energetic actress, "I've definitely been tired," she told the press, "*Buffy* is a real difficult show to shoot. I never have a day off. Sometimes they don't finish shooting until 2 a.m., and I have to be there at 5 some mornings. Basically, I'd work Monday to Thursday on *Buffy* then I'd start **SCREAM** on Friday, wouldn't finish until Sunday and just basically go straight to *Buffy*, shower and start work there. But it's something I want to do, and 20 years old is kind of the time to do it. I can sleep when I'm dead." When asked if she feared being typecast as a scream queen due to her role as *Buffy* and playing in two horror movies back to back she replied, "It's random that I've worked three things in a row this way, It's happened because, of all the scripts that have been offered to me, these have been the three most interesting, diverse roles. And you know, if I get stuck doing work like this, God help me I should be so

lucky."

SCREAM 2 picks up two years after the events of the original **SCREAM**. Cocky reporter Gale Weathers (**Courtney Cox**) has penned a successful book on the events of the masked killer and has come to Windsor College to reunite on camera the original femme fatale Sidney Prescott (**Neve Campbell**) with the man she falsely accused of the crimes, Cotton Weary (**Liew Schreiber**). This newsworthy event conveniently coincides with the premiere of the movie "*Stab*," a film based on Gale's book. But things quickly go awry on the opening night of "*Stab*" when a masked assailant kills two college students. The jaded theater audience simply assumes the killing is part of the elaborate opening night entertainment because each patron has been handed a novelty package containing a mask, robe and rubber knife. Afterwards the college is abuzz with media as everyone fears the serial killings are starting again. Even the injured deputy Dwight 'Dewey' Riley (**David Arquette**), another **SCREAM** holdover, comes to Windsor to offer Sidney his help.

The cast of suspects is quickly set up. Is it Gale Weathers looking for publicity for her book and film? How about Randy Meeks (**Jaime Kennedy**), a horror film buff leftover from the first film? Sidney's new boyfriend Derek (**Jerry O'Connell**) suspiciously seems to never be around when a murder happens. Cotton Weary is very agitated for not having received his fifteen minutes of fame. Don't forget Debbie (**Laurie Metcalf**), a local newswoman looking for her big break, could she be behind all this? Don't take notes. The ending is so far out of kilter that no one will be able to figure it out with any of the clues



Sarah Michelle Gellar looks for a way out of **SIMPLY IRRESISTIBLE**.



Portia de Rossi, Rebecca Gayheart and Sarah Michelle Gellar in **SCREAM 2**.



given.

SCREAM 2 simply attempts to coast along on the success of the first film, but what seemed hip and original in the first film already appears tired and worn out by now. And watching **SCREAM 2** is not recommended to those who haven't seen the first because the movie makes little attempt in trying to explain what has already taken place. It simply assumes that you saw the first film and moves on from there.

The amplified relationship between Weathers and Dewey wears thin real fast. You'll find yourself tapping your feet as their subtle flirting quickly becomes annoying. You just wait for the inevitable to hurry up and happen. (Cox and Arquette met in the first **SCREAM** and would marry in 1999.)

The non-stop jokes kill any suspense the movie is able to conjure up... although the comedy seems to supply its only real moments of delirious pleasure, such as in the opening scenes at the premiere of "*Stab*" when the victim in the movie gets a call from the killer an annoyed movie-goer (who ends up being killed) yells, "*Hang up and star-69 his ass!*" Or when Gale's reasons for taking up smoking are because she got upset over some nude photos of her displayed the Internet. She protests, "*Someone took my head and pasted it on Jennifer Aniston's body!*" Despite the handful of jokes of genuine value, there isn't enough to disguise the fact that they are mere attempts to eat up time.

Sarah Michelle Gellar is billed high in the credits, but her screen presence is less than ten minutes. She plays Casey "CiCi" Cooper, a sorority sister that is left alone at the sorority house while all her sisters go out to party. She is elected the sober sister, and must remain on call in case one of the drunken sorority girls needs a ride home. But, of course, who calls but none other than the killer. It isn't long before she becomes one of the

many on the long list of victims. She could have easily been labeled "Victim #3" since her part adds nothing substantial to the movie. Her most redeeming factor may have been her one short scene in a classroom where she declares that violence in Hollywood films is not responsible for real acts of violence. Ironically, in March of 2000, Sarah wrote an article that circulated through the associated press entitled "*Stop Blaming Hollywood for Violent Behavior*" as her defense to substantiate films such as **SCREAM** and her own TV show **Buffy**. "*I've always felt that, as an entertainer, my job is to tell a story and make people feel things, which may not always mean taking the moral high ground,*" she wrote to those right-wing purists looking for a scapegoat. "*If a teenager can't discern right from wrong or fiction from reality, I'm pretty confident that it has little to do with whether he or she watches Buffy or plays aggressive video games and more to do with the fact that society has failed to teach him or her how to make those distinctions. It is my belief that our true life lessons come from our parents and teachers - these are the people who have the most opportunity and power to shape young minds. In the bigger scheme of things, the role they play is much more influential than the one I carry out on TV.*" Who could not wholeheartedly agree with her words?

Look for cameo parts by **Heather Graham** playing the **Drew Barrymore** part from the first **SCREAM** in "*Stab*," **Tori Spelling** playing **Neve Campbell's** role and **Portia de Rossi** as sorority sister Murphy who would begin to see her own star rise the following year in **Ally McBeal**.

When all said and done it boils down to the fact that **SCREAM 2** would have been a much better movie had the first **SCREAM** never been made. As it is, one cannot avoid making comparisons to the original and, after careful consideration, wish they had just watched the first film a second time.



I KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER (1997 - Directed by Jim Gillespie)

Sarah Michelle Gellar had just finished shooting the first season of **Buffy the Vampire Slayer** when she stepped into the film **I KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER**. As the first **Buffy** show began to air, Gellar stepped in behind lead **Jennifer Love Hewitt**, who had already gained notoriety with her part as (ironically) Sarah on **Party of Five**. At the time it appeared that **I KNOW** would be nothing more than a simple teenage slasher flick. "*We all thought it was just a little teen fright film that*



would have a two-week window at Halloween," Sarah told reporters after its release, "*It's been a runaway hit.*" Sarah auditioned for the part using her high-pitched shrieks to win the producers over. She told **Jay Leno** on **The Tonight Show**, "*Screaming was my entire screen test for I KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER. I just stood there and screamed for about five minutes.*"

The story begins with the stunning Helen (Gellar) winning a beauty contest in a small fishing town in North Carolina. As she works the audience in her form-fitting bathing suit her three friends, Julie (Love-Hewitt), Ray (Freddie Prince Jr.) and boyfriend Barry (Ryan Phillippe) cheer her on. Afterwards the four go out to celebrate the victory on a secluded beach where they reveal their future plans to each other. Julie has a scholarship and prepares to leave for college while Ray also has plans to go to school. The two cement their lasting bond by consummating their relationship on the beach. The more conceited Helen and Barry reveal more obnoxious plans, with Helen going to New York to become an actress and Ray becoming a football star.

The night ends on a good note with despite the off-key antics of the drunken Barry who is reluctant to hand over his car keys to Ray. As Ray maneuvers the winding road along the seaside cliffs, Barry stands up through the sunroof to scream into the night, eventually dropping his bottle of booze into Ray's lap. Ray becomes distracted and doesn't see the man standing in the road around the next curve and they slam into him.

While the four contemplate what has happened they find themselves forced to make a decision on what to do with this cold limp stranger. Should they call the police and report the accident - in all probability winding up in jail for manslaughter since their car reeks of alcohol - or simply dump the body into the water and let the sea carry their troubles away. Julie wants to

call the cops but gets quickly voted down by the other three who don't want to see their futures slip away from them.

Julie finally agrees to dispose of the body. It isn't until they are dumping the "corpse" into the water that they discover he is still alive. He reaches up and grabs the tiara off Helen's head before he is knocked into the ocean. Barry dives in to retrieve the crown but the situation has now changed. What started out as accident has now turned to murder. Barry demands that everyone must swear to carry this secret to their graves.

Almost a year later the once promising dreams of the small group are all but shattered. Julie is close to losing her scholarship due to failing grades. Helen's dreams of acting in New York were quickly shot down and she is now back working in the family store. Ray works at the fishing docks. And Barry...well Barry is still an obnoxious prick.

The once close-knit four have not spoken to each other since the night of the incident. But shortly after Julie arrives home she gets a note that simply states, "*I know what you did last summer.*" Panic stricken she regroups with her one-time friends to try and find out who wrote the note. It is then that the madness starts.

One by one each member of the little ensemble is threatened by the note-writing maniac. Barry is ran over by his own car and left battered and bruised. Helen gets her long beautiful locks cut off while she is sleeping. Julie finds the dead body of another high school friend shoved into the trunk of her car and covered with live crabs. And Ray, well he gets a note.

As the threats pile up, so do the suspects. Julie and Helen go to visit the sister of the man they ran over to find out more information about him, hoping to figure out who may be on the rampage for his revenge. As clues are revealed, the begin to suspect that they may have not ran over the person they think they have - that the

man they thought was dead may be alive - and that Ray may be part of the morbid plan. Ray is the obvious weak link in this snobby chain since he has always been given the suspicious eye as the poor teen of the group, not really fitting in with his more affluent friends. As the one-year anniversary of the murder approaches, everything comes to a head with the killer making his way through the July 4th celebration in his fisherman slicker and with his trusty hook in hand.

This movie stands apart as one of the better slasher flicks out there. As with most teenage horror films the plot is pretty standard and the acting is usually mediocre at best. Luckily, the makers of **I KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER** were able to get their hands on a talented bunch of newcomers that were willing to work in a movie of this nature. Writer **Kevin Williamson**, who had just come off the success of **SCREAM**, spoke with high praises of Gellar's performance to *TV Guide*, "You know that when you hire her to do a job she's not going to be in the trailer, complaining about everything. She's going to be right out there at three in the morning, barefoot, in the freezing cold, giving you the 10th take." And Sarah does what she can to shake off the typical blonde bimbo stereotype that is commonly associated with this type of film. Having just finished filming a season of **Buffy the Vampire Slayer**, her initial instincts were not to simply sit back and passively be killed. Although her character knows she is attractive and uses her beauty to her advantage, she never comes across as weak. Helen kicks out the window of a police car when she finds herself trapped inside and jumps from a second-story building in another valiant attempt to get away. When *Movieline* asked her if she thought powerful women were sexy she replied, "Incredibly sexy. The time when men wanted a mousy woman who stayed at home is gone. Men are turned on by a powerful woman, especially a physically powerful woman. I'm a little person, and to see this five-foot-two, 100-pound blonde girl kicking ass is exciting." Unfortunately for Helen, her aggressive attempts to escape are fruitless, which ends in one of the more visual and visceral killings of the movie. As Helen attempts to make it through the alley to the marching band on the street, the killer catches her behind some rubbish to snuff out her life. There is a very uneasy feeling one gets as the young girl is being killed only a few feet away from a joyous celebration. It is carefully choreographed scenes of this nature that park **I KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER** one rung above the other films of this genre.

Overall, **I KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER** truly succeeded in that

it didn't follow the standardized teen slasher flick format. It created a mystery in which one had to decipher the clues, yet at the same time continually had things popping out of places to keep the scares in tact. The graphic killings will suffice for the gore fans but the superfluous nudity that is usually associated with the teenage horror flick is avoided. Though watching Sarah and Jennifer in an assortment of snug fitting clothing will keep the male viewer's attention, be assured of that. It has its share of the usual horror movie story flaws, but it's an enjoyable movie to watch. Prince and Hewitt would return a year later to do the sequel. Sarah's decomposed Helen was not invited to that reunion. A must watch movie for Sarah Michelle Gellar fans.



BEVERLY HILLS FAMILY ROBINSON (1997 - Directed by Troy Miller)

A unique lesson in family values is learned when TV cooking show host Marsha Robinson (**Dyan Cannon**) keeps her family on a tight schedule in order to appease her shooting schedule. The whole family must be on camera as she presents her lavish meals in their supposedly ideal family atmosphere. When the red light goes off each family member heads to their separate corner where husband Doug (**Martin Mull**), an orthodontist, makes a plain cheese sandwich, daughter Jane (Sarah Michelle Gellar) talks on her cell phone and son Roger (**Ryan O'Donohue**), talks about wind surfing. When the cameras come back on, the family quickly reunites at the dining room table again to portray the perfect American family at supper.

Things change radically for the family when Marsha's show has to go to sea to film a tropical vacation segment. The family decides to stay on the yacht alone for one night in hopes of some quality time together, but mid-way through the night the boat is hijacked by three pirates and taken out to sea. After the family overtakes the bumbling trio and kicks them off the yacht and into a lifeboat, they run into a bad storm that capsizes the yacht and leaves them stranded on a deserted island.

Once on the island they find they must pull together as a unit to survive, and they begin to become a family again. Marsha finds out how much she has been neglecting her husband and kids and she too joins in to help make their new island home a suitable place for them to live. The group also finds another castaway on the island, a wind surfer named Digger (**Josh Picker**) who falls in love with



The only reason to watch BEVERLY HILLS FAMILY ROBINSON.

Marsha's cooking as well as their daughter Jane. He agrees to help them build their dream tree house in exchange for food and to stay as close to Jane as possible. In the true spirit of the original Swiss Family Robinson, they erect a massive tree house. But, when things couldn't seem to get any better, the three pirates that were evicted off of their yacht make it to the island and now they want revenge.

This movie could not be any hokier. Although they are only on the island around a month, they construct a three bedroom; one and half bath tree house with a breakfast nook. Running water, electricity, this massive bamboo structure would even have the castaways from *Gilligan's Island* shaking their heads in disbelief. All the effort in constructing a home site would have been better spent just exploring the island as by the end of the film Roger windsurfs to a neighboring island after they discover it has a hotel on it!

Other illogical blunders are the three pirates floating around in a raft for nearly a month. With each equipped with only one bottle of water, a sandwich and a piece of fruit, you can ration all you want but eventually someone is going to go all "Donner Party" before that float trip is over. And how did they survive that horrendous storm that capsized the Robinson's yacht? I guess the audience is supposed to turn a blind eye to blatantly obvious questions.

What is with Digger? This guy looks like he is in his early 20s but no one seems to question him about making out with Jane, who is only 16 or 17. Something tells me more parents might be a little more worried about leaving their attractive daughter in the hands of a guy that has been alone on a deserted island for such long time. Ah, but this is Disney. Everything is bright and cheery and no one gets hurt. Even when the family attacks the pirates with bombs, to the extent of blowing up the entire tree

house with them in it, they still survive without even a scratch.

Although one expects to get the Mr. Rogers treatment with a Disney movie of the week, this one is so squeaky clean and completely irrational that even the eight-year-olds it is aimed at will start cursing at the TV screen in disbelief.

Even with a good cast, the talent cannot rise above the watered down script. Although I'm sure all the boys will get a rise watching Sarah Michelle Gellar in a bathing suit, everything quickly sinks the second she walks off the screen.

While in Australia shooting **BEVERLY HILLS FAMILY ROBINSON**, Gellar was paged to audition for *Buffy*, not as the lead, but for the character Cordelia, which she got. When they still hadn't found someone to play the lead role two weeks later, she continued to audition a total of eleven times. "On my last audition I went in and tested and came out and they said, 'We need you to read one more time,' and I just started to cry," Gellar told the press. "I said, 'I can't do this. You guys are wrecking me. I lived and breathed this for two weeks. I can't do it anymore. I don't have it in me.' Then the casting director basically dragged me back in and everybody started laughing and said, 'Congratulations, you got the role.' Meanwhile, I was still crying and sniveling."



HIGH STAKES (1989 - Directed by Amos Kollek)

A gritty R-rated adventure starring **Sally Kirkland** as Melanie Rose, a two-bit stripper and hooker who found her way to skid row after she and her drunken husband wrecked their car, ending in his death and leaving Melanie on her own with a small child.

Now she is willing to do whatever she has to in order to make enough money to get back on her feet so she can support her daughter Karen (Sarah Michelle Gellar).

After one night in the strip club she returns home to find John (**Robert LuPone**) sprawled out in the alley having just been mugged. She lets him talk her into coming up to her apartment for a glass of water where the two do a little flirting and start to get intimate when one of the pimps she works for comes in looking for his money. After slapping her around a little and then punching John, Melanie and John overtake him and steal his gun and his money. They then get in a stolen car and make a run for it.

Melanie plans on skipping town and goes to collect her daughter at her mother's house, but it is too late. The head of the prostitution organization, Slim (played by the always creepy **Richard Lynch**), has taken her and is holding her hostage. John decides to go with Melanie to rescue her daughter, even though he has no real reason to go any deeper into this nightmare. In actuality, John is a multi-millionaire who does stock trading during the day. He had witnessed his partner's suicide earlier that evening after he complained that even though they were rich, they were letting lives pass them by. These inspiring words inspire John to link up with this hooker and her array of problems.

Things go from bad to worse when they show up at Slim's den of corruption, where he is holding the small Karen hostage. In order to get her back, John agrees to play a game of Russian Roulette with Slim in which all but one bullet is taken out of a pistol that a hooker is holding to John's head. If John's head isn't blown off, Slim will double the money that Melanie has already stolen and release Karen. John, being a financial speculator and used to "high stakes," isn't satisfied with not getting killed when the trigger is pulled and goes for double or nothing two more times – and much to Slim's dismay – wins. Although John, Melanie and Karen get away, they still suffer the wrath of a pimp when John is shot in the shoulder. But all ends well as John lives and decides to part the company the mother and daughter – but not before slipping them a check for \$100,000.

The movie doesn't end there. Melanie doesn't cash the check but instead takes up a normal job. She reconnects with John after Karen sees a picture of him in an investor magazine. John wants to be with Melanie but can't make the commitment, so she confronts him one last time for him to make his choice.

Made in 1989 this movie feels like an early '70s flick. It is gritty and grimy and you feel like you need a

shower after you watch it. Sally Kirkland, who has an impressive list of both movies and TV shows, must have been having an off-night as her over-acting is painful to watch. But run along side of Robert LuPone's under-acting, the producers must have figured things evened out. Richard Lynch's name was at the top of the list if you needed a bad guy for a movie around this time. He fits the part so well you believe he was released from the mental ward at a maximum-security prison the day of shooting. To sprinkle a little more flavor to this bizarre stew, look for Kathy Bates as John's office assistant. Hard to believe she would win an Oscar® only a year later for **MISERY**.

This is Sarah Michelle Gellar's biggest role in a feature film as a child and it is easy to see the promise in such young actress as she upstaged most of her adult co-stars. "It was about a woman bringing up her daughter, who ironically was [played by] Sarah Michelle Gellar, age ten," Sally Kirkland told *Soap Digest*. "It was back in 1988 and here was this little ten-year-old that I got to cry on cue!" Kirkland complained that in order to get work in Hollywood she had to have breast implants to get the attention she needed. She had the operation done once before playing the role in the movie **ANNA** (for which she was nominated for an Academy Award), and then had it doubled before getting the part in **HIGH STAKES**. She would later have them removed after getting crippling pain from the silicone and became a prominent spokesperson to help other women suffering from the same problems.

This is a good movie for anyone wanting to see a really young Sarah in action (and it's the only time that she was credited simply as Sarah Gellar), but don't expect much of anything else from the production. Kirkland claimed that **HIGH STAKES** "was a precursor to **PRETTY WOMAN**," which is true, but the film never saw even remotely the same type of success, although that isn't to say it was any worse... at least Kirkland was "pretty"...



FUNNY FARM (1988
– Directed by George Roy Hill)

When New York sports writer Andy Farmer (**Chevy Chase**) decides to quit his job and move to the country to write his dream novel, everything goes wrong. Accompanied by his wife Elizabeth (**Madolyn Smith-Osborne**), the couple endures the trials and tribulations when their ideal of country living and the reality of country living clash dramatically.

Cases in point: the original owner of the house they just bought is buried in their garden, a psychotic drunken postman throws the mail out of his passing truck while driving at break-neck speeds, the local police chief doesn't have a drivers license and has to be ferried around in a taxi cab... just to name a few. If this wasn't enough, Andy finds he is incapable of writing a novel and is aghast when his wife's writing career accidentally takes off, leaving him feeling like a failure. The accumulated problems push the couple towards divorce. It all comes down to involving the entire town to help them unload their now unwanted house onto another naïve couple.

Although uncredited, it is difficult to read any bio on Sarah Michelle Gellar and not see her listed as a bit player in this movie, usually listed as "Madolyn Smith-Osborne's student." But Madolyn is never shown teaching and there are no students! At least not in the versions we have seen. Sarah would have been around 10 years old at the time this was shot, so it is more logical that she is one of the bit players of the town, but good luck in locating her in the long shots of the extras or shots of kids bundled in winter apparel (we strongly suspect she is one of the snowball throwing kids towards the end of the film).

A typical Chevy Chase slap-schtick comedy that is fun to watch, but should be avoided by Sarah Michelle Gellar fans looking to see the actress as a child... unless you want to kill time playing an elaborate game of "Where's Waldo." If you find her, let's us know.

OVER THE BROOKLYN BRIDGE (1984 – Directed by Menahem Golan)

Alby Sherman (**Elliott Gould**) runs a luncheonette in Brooklyn and wants

to step into the big time by buying a restaurant in Manhattan. Unable to raise the down payment he is forced to approach his rich Uncle Benjamin (**Sid Caesar**) for the money. Uncle Benjamin is willing to give him the \$60,000 he needs if Alby agrees to dump his Catholic Irish girlfriend Elizabeth (**Margaux Hemingway**) and marry a Jewish woman. The entire movie revolves around Alby's dilemma of staying with the woman he loves or falling in line with the rest of the family and fulfilling his dream by kissing his Uncle's ass.

Sarah Michelle Gellar makes an especially brief appearance on a bench as Alby's friend Phil (**Burt Young**) argues with his wife... Sarah is one of Phil's kids. Sneeze and you'll miss her because she doesn't speak a word.

As a Gellar movie this is a waste of time... as a regular movie this is a complete waste of time. My only recommendation for this film is to see Margaux Hemingway in the prime of her life, who was quite a looker in her early days. Unfortunately a rough life of drinking and failed marriages got the best of her and she allegedly committed suicide in 1996. Her sister **Mariel** claims that the media created the suicide story to make for better press, insisting that her sister died of an epileptic seizure.

AN INVASION OF PRIVACY (1983 – Directed by Mel Damski)

This was a made-for-TV movie in which Sarah plays **Valerie Harper's** daughter. The story revolves around a woman who is raped on a remote island and then must fight for justice. This movie is not currently available on video.



Still Sarah Michelle Gellar's best role.

ONE OF THE NICE ONES:

An interview with AMBER BENSON by Mike Watt



involved with
*Buffy the Vampire
Slayer?*

AMBER BENSON: Boringly enough, I just auditioned for it. I'd known Alyson before; we'd met through mutual friends. So I'd seen the show since she was on it but I never watched a bunch of them in a row...but I thought it was a really good show, really well done. And I was very excited to go in and read for it. I went in and met with Joss and he was really cool. They said, "Well, we're going to have callbacks!" And this and that. But then I got a phone call when I'm halfway out of town, saying that they were going to change the callback to that afternoon, "Can you come back?" And I said, "I'm almost in San Francisco, I can't come back! There's no way. Even if I turned around now I'd never make it." So I kind of wrote it off, thinking it's not going to happen. Bad luck. Then they called again and said that they didn't find who they were looking for and wanted me to come back in. So I went back in and later I got a phone call telling me I'd gotten the part. That was funny too, because just as my agent called to tell me I'd gotten the part, Allyson Hannigan called at the same time to give me the news. She'd heard from Joss that I'd gotten the part. So that was really nice.

SoC: Has Tara's development over the past three seasons been because of you or the writers?

AB: It's a group of effort. The way that Joss had written it, he wanted Tara to really blossom under Willow's affection. I've tried to take it further because she needed to be growing. She has an arc and I really want her to grow up in front of people's eyes and find out who she is. It showed people that you can be really shy and quiet, and you can become a more outgoing person. (Tara's relationship with Willow) is very nice. It's sweet and romantic. I think it's actually the most romantic relationship on *Buffy* right now. I think because she and I are comfortable with each other, it makes it really easy.

SoC: Did you know from the start that Tara and Willow were going to be involved romantically?

AB: Going into it, I did not realize that we were going to have a relationship. Everyone else kept coming up to us from the WB - they'd seen the episodes and were concerned about the sexual tension. I looked at Alyson and said, "Uh, what are they...talking about?" [Laughs] I was supposed to be her friend - I thought, "Her friend!" So then Joss comes to us after all this and says, "I was intending this." We're like, "Thanks for letting us know!" But people really did comment on it from the beginning. I didn't know. I was really excited about doing it, though, because we would become, really, the first long-term lesbian relationship on television. There was the *Ellen* show, but she flitted between relationships, but (her relationship with the viewers) was destroyed when she finally came out that she didn't get the chance to do what she wanted to do with the show. With *Buffy* I felt we were really going to get the chance to say



something. To say, "Hey, you know, this is not really an alternate lifestyle, this is a lifestyle. Get used to it! This is normal, this is how it goes." So it was definitely interesting to have this little talk with Joss, then to talk to Alyson later. "We'll be kissing later, won't we? I wonder what Alexis (Denisoff) is going to say about that." He's her real boyfriend; he's on *Angel*. He was quite happy with it, actually. [Laughs] He keeps inviting me over for dinner. I don't know what that's all about. I'm just kidding.

SoC: What kind of director is Joss, anyway?

AB: Okay, some of the directors direct, and some of the directors are more interested in the camera. Joss tends to be a little of both. He trusts you, which he does all of us. He lets you do your own thing. But if there's something really important to him, he'll take you aside and kind of "This is how I want you to do this." He doesn't give you line-readings. He never says, "You will say..." But he definitely has his ideas about certain (key points). They tend to be emotional things, especially with me. He has a fondness of the relationship between Tara and Willow. He had certain elements that he really wanted tweak, so we would concentrate on making those moments really resonant. There was the time that (Willow and Tara fought, then) made up and kissed, and he wanted twelve takes. Somehow, I think there was more to that. [Laughs] We were doing take after take - and I think it was more than just getting the right tone of the scene. Seriously, when I was kissing Alyson Hannigan, after doing take after take, I almost stuck my tongue in her mouth! [Laughs] I said, "I'm not a lesbian, but I'm really starting to feel like one today!" I think I embarrassed her. But if there's something he wants you to hit, he will definitely work with you to get you to hit that word, that moment, that emotion.

SoC: How has the fan reaction been to your character? Did you expect her to become as popular as she did?

AB: I definitely didn't think Tara was going to be so popular. I actually felt she was kind of peripheral at first. She just kind of came in, did her lines. All her scenes were with Willow. Everybody really missed Oz a lot. [Laughs] I didn't feel like I was coming in to fill Seth's shoes - not that I did. There's no way anyone could do that. But she kind of found her own place. I've been really blessed to be able to play her. I felt very honored to walk in her shoes. I'm just really glad to have gotten the chance to meet everyone. I made so many new friends! I've only had good

While Amber Benson has some very impressive film credits under her belt - making her debut in Stephen Soderbergh's **KING OF THE HILL**, and moving on to appear in **THE PRIME GIG** alongside Ed Harris, **DON'S PLUM** with Leonardo DiCaprio and Tobey Maguire, and most recently, completing **TABOO** with Nick Stahl - she is best known for her role as Tara on the hit TV show, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. (For those unfamiliar with the show, *Buffy* takes place in a world over-run by vampires, but fortunately, the title character, Buffy Summers, and her army of talented friends, save the Earth from destruction week after week.)

Tara is a groundbreaking role, particularly for U.S. television, because she is one-half of an on-going lesbian love affair, with Alyson Hannigan's Willow character completing the couple. The relationship is one of the most tender and romantic currently on TV, and has never gotten the least bit exploitation, thanks to the skills of the actresses and the deft handling by the show's creator, Joss Whedon.

The show ended on a somber note this past season when Tara was accidentally shot and killed during the two-part finale. This death pushed magically addicted Willow over the edge. She embraced dark magic and attempted to end the world out of her own overwhelming grief. Tara's death was a painful decision for Whedon to make, one that outraged many of the show's fans, particularly those in the gay and lesbian community. Still, if you think about it, *Buffy* herself has already died twice on the show, so who's to say that Tara is gone for good?

Putting her time in television's hereafter to good use, Amber is contributing in a major way to a *Buffy* comic book series. The first issue was a one-shot entitled "Blessed Wannabe." The next story will be a two-issue mini-series due out this summer.

SIRENS OF THE CINEMA: So, Amber, how did you get

encounters with Buffy fans. I went to this party that the fans put on to raise money for charity...this one girl came up to me and she was in tears. And then I started crying, and she started crying harder. And she came out because of Willow and Tara's relationship. "I came out because of you and now I have a girlfriend and I'm happy. And I just wanted to thank you." And I started crying harder, and she was crying harder, and Joss walks by and says, "All right, everybody's going downstairs now." I've just been really lucky with this Buffy thing. It seems to have spoken to so many people. People are really moved by what happens on the show, and they like being a part of it."

SoC: Have you been confronted with any backlash over the Tara/Willow relationship that has cropped up? Do you have an added sense of responsibility?

AB: I think more people were upset that I was taking over where Seth Green left off than that I was portraying a lesbian. But, yes, anytime you put yourself in front of the camera, you have to be aware of the fact that people will emulate what you do. You must be responsible for your actions off camera as well. You are in the public eye and have to learn to set an example, not cause more problems in this world. Enough sanctimonious stuff. Sorry.

SoC: How do you respond to the anger from the members of the gay and lesbian community over Tara's death?

AB: At first I felt, God, maybe this is not what we need to do here. We didn't want to put it out there that, "Okay, here's this lesbian couple, let's kill one of them! Yeah, that's what we need to do: kill lesbians!" But then I talked to Joss, and it really wasn't about that. He doesn't even see them as a lesbian couple. He sees just Willow and Tara. Just as individuals. He really saw that Willow was going through something, and the only thing she really loved and really cared about, was Tara. And to have something happen to Tara was the only way that Willow would get pushed to the limit. It was the only way that she was going to hit bottom. She wasn't in recovery as a magical addict. She was just floating, just getting by by the seat of her pants. And then this happens. It really pushed her over the edge. I knew two years ago that it was going to happen, and I felt iffy about it. So Joss and I really talked about it. This was really a violent emotional thing. This was two people who really loved each other and they really got screwed. You know? I don't think that we put it out there that we were into killing lesbian characters. It was really about individuals and emotions. I think we did a lot more good than bad.

SoC: What was your own reaction to playing the death scene?

AB: It was really, really difficult. A close friend of mine passed away last year. She was Marti Noxon's assistant. And such a sweet, wonderful person. Our production office, where she worked, was right upstairs from the soundstage where we shoot, and to be at the same place - she'd come down to hang out on the set - and to associate her, and then here I am. Sarah and I talked about it. It made me feel uncomfortable and unhappy, it just brought back a lot of feelings. She was the first person I'd lost that I was really close to. You lose grandparents, and I was really little, and I didn't know them. But to lose someone you saw from day to day, someone you could hang out with, someone you can go sing karaoke with. So it was really tough to be on that set and playing dead. It was really tough. Sarah was really great - I'm such a huge fan of Sarah Michelle Gellar. If you need something, she'll be there. Three in the morning, she'll be there. It's really kind of frightening. She's very Buffy-like.

SoC: Now you're writing for the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* comic book with Christopher Golden.

AB: Chris (Golden) is awesome. I was really, really lucky. Chris approached me about it and, if he hadn't,

I never would have gotten involved in comics. I'm just so lucky that he thought I could do it. He's just such a cool guy. He's written a lot of stuff for *BUFFY*. I couldn't have done it without Chris. He walked me through the entire process after I moaned, "I need help! I don't know what I'm doing." Chris introduced me to the realm of comic books. He did indeed-y. It was his idea to do a Tara/Willow comic, and I was just along for the ride.

SoC: I spoke to him and he said it was your idea.

AB: He's full of it! It was his idea! He and I work really well together, because I think we both think in the same vein. We're both into science fiction and scary books and mythology. Chris had some of the same ideas that I do, so he made it really easy to collaborate and make something cool. I think he did a nice job on it.

SoC: You're a science fiction fan?



Buffy the Vampire Slayer: Willow & Tara #1 comic from Dark Horse.

AB: Oh definitely. I think what's so great about science fiction is that it's an escape. So when you sit down in front of *Buffy* for an hour, you're not in your life, you're in crazy Sunnydale, with all the insanity, and vampires and the witches and monsters!

SoC: Tell me about your directorial debut with the movie *CHANCE*, which you also wrote and star in.

AB: I think it's going to be really good. I'm excited about it. James Marsters [*Buffy's* "Spike" - Ed.] is in it. And David Feury, who's one of the writer/producers on the show, he took a part as the "Pizza Guy." It's really just my take on trying to figure out just who the heck you are in your twenties. Trying to find somebody that you really connect with on more than just a physical basis. That's kind of what it's about. I started writing the script a few years ago. When I finished it, I never did anything with it. I didn't think anyone else out in Hollywood would appreciate it. It's my story, my thing, you know? I didn't want to shop it around (saying), "Hey you wanna buy my movie?" They'd tell me to screw off. So some friends of mine and I were talking at dinner one night, and they said, "Heck with it, why don't you do it yourself? Send it over. We'll look at it." So I did, and they really liked it, and we just decided to do it ourselves. It took about three months of pre-production, and five weekends worth of filming, now we're in editing process. Which is really scary! I can't believe five week-

ends are over. We did this for no money. Whatever I made from *Buffy* we funneled into it. And whatever my sister in college didn't need. We did it really low budget. I think our budget was \$25,000. I know that sounds like a lot of money to people out there, but it's so not.

SoC: How did you enjoy directing?

AB: I like directing. Screw the acting! I wanna be a director! That's where all the fun is.

Luckily I was surrounded by this incredible crew. I have a wonderful director of photography Patrice (Lucien Cochet). Because I acted in it, I had to get into makeup, and wardrobe and stuff. So I'm running around in half-finished makeup going, "Okay, get the lights inside, I'll be right back, meet you at the monitor!" We VHS'ed everything so that we could go back and look and see how things were coming. It was intense. Even the sound guy, Dennis (Baxter), got into it. He'd yell out, "Hey, the eye-line looks a little funny!" Then I'd have to come back and look. Luckily, I had a friend who could stand in for me so I could come and go and see what was up. So between all of them, and my mother, who was sitting around going, "Okay, that looks funny when you do that!" I got myself taken care of. I was okay with everybody else, because I knew what I wanted from them, so that wasn't a problem. It was just me trying to make sure I was doing what I was supposed to do. I think we got 22 hours of raw footage. But it's on digital, so it's not like it was this expensive film stock dealie. It looks fantastic. I didn't realize but digital looks really good these days. We shot with a Cannon XL1. We might filmlook it. I don't know. We'll see how it turns out. I'm hoping not. I'm hoping that what we can do on an Avid [a digital editing system - Ed.] will be enough.

SoC: What are your plans for it once it's complete?

AB: Just going to take it to festivals and see what happens. I haven't shown it to anybody yet. I've been really secretive. It's my baby! No one can touch it! It's all mine! I don't know. If I can't sell it, I'll put it on the Internet.

SoC: So aside from you, how were the other actors?

AB: I did not have a bad actor the whole way through. Everybody was fantastic. Stephen Soderbergh gave me the best piece of advice I've ever gotten: "When you direct, the real directing comes in the casting." And I agree with him so much, now that I've done my own thing. Because he's so right. If you cast people that you know are going to be wonderful and give you what you need, you don't have to stop every five minutes and say, "Okay, I want you to read the line like this..." I was just so lucky. (All the actors on *CHANCE*) were all in their grooves, and they listened, and they were so good, I didn't have to work hard to get them to give me the things that I needed. They just intuitively were there. We got great stuff. It was like magical. Everybody came in and they became the characters that I'd seen in my head. And if they weren't one hundred percent what I'd seen in my head, they brought something so different and unique and new to it that, "Whoa, I never saw it like that! That's really cool, let's do it like that!" I was really lucky.

SoC: Your career certainly got off on the right foot, working with Stephen Soderbergh.

AB: KING OF THE HILL was amazing. I was fifteen, I guess. To go in and read for Stephen Soderbergh, and then to actually get the part! It just blew my mind. I was so nervous and uptight about it, and then it was such a wonderful experience. The best film I've worked on. It was like a big family. We shot in St. Louis, and we all stayed in this big hotel, everyone would hang out in the bar at night after filming. It was fantastic.

Visit Amber on the web at her official website, The Essence of Amber: <http://www.amberbenson.net>.

[Extra special thanks goes out to Little Willow for her assistance with this interview. <http://slayground.net/yourgirl/>]



BLUE CRUSH (Starring Kate Bosworth, Michelle Rodriguez, Sanoe Lake, Mika Boorem, Matthew Davis. Directed by John Stockwell)

Based on a magazine article entitled "Surf Girls of Maui," we are transported to the lush beaches of Oahu, Hawaii where we see Anne Marie (Kate Bosworth) in training for an upcoming Pipe Masters surf competition, an event that almost

killed her years before. Living in a shack on the beach with her 14-year old sister Penny (Mika Boorem) and her two friends Eden (Michelle Rodriguez) and Lena (Sanoe Lake), the group of young women get up at the crack of dawn to catch the first waves of the day, drop Penny off to school and then report to work as maids at a luxury hotel where they go through the disgusting duties of cleaning up other peoples slop in order to eek out a meager existence on the island. Then it's back home to catch a little more surf time.

As the competition approaches it becomes obvious that Anne Marie is not ready for the monster waves of the Pipe Masters. With every attempt to ride the big one she quickly backs down as flashbacks of her near fatal accident, which sent her head first into the coral reef below, come flashing back. Entering the competition against the other professional surfers could bring her the sponsorship she

so sorely needs to break out of her financial woes, as well as gain the respect she feels women surfers so greatly need. But the burdens of Anne Marie's life are becoming too much to bear. Anne Marie's mother left her and her little sister on their own, traipsing off with one of many beaus to Vegas. Now she is responsible for Penny, who has taken to drinking and partying instead of doing her schoolwork. Her dead end job finally gets the best of her when she is forced to clean up a nauseating room complete with a used condom on the floor. She takes the vile rubber down to the beach to approach the occupants of the room, several professional football players on vacation, and she shows them the proper disposal of such nasty products. Her little stint of reprimanding these "VIPs" earns her a quick dismissal from the hotel... she is now without a job.

As things seem to be crashing around Anne Marie the quarterback from the football team, Matt Tollman (Matthew Davis), approaches her about surfing lessons. Anne Marie and her friends earn \$150 an hour teaching the team's players, as Anne Marie falls in love with Matt. While she spends her nights at the luxury hotel with Matt, Eden continues to push her to prepare for the competition. But Anne Marie has lost her competitive edge and has become mere eye candy for her new boyfriend, taking the easy way out.

Things come to a head when she must decide to either remain the girlfriend of the prosperous quarterback or to follow her lifelong dream. When looking for answers her new boyfriend tells her "to be herself." She has become so confused that she has to ask him who he thinks she is. He comes back with the motivating inspiration that is the real theme of the movie; she should be "the girl I met on the beach who would never ask a guy what she should do."

BLUE CRUSH is everything you wouldn't expect from a movie of this type. It's a beach movie with an array of beautiful women in bikinis, but that aspect is never exploited.

Whereas you might expect mega beer parties, crazy surfing antics and general summer-fun outlandishness, you end up with a realistic story of a girl in search of her dream. The beautiful thing about **BLUE CRUSH** is the fact that it never veers from its intent, there is never an easy resolution to a problem and everything isn't wrapped up with a bow at the end. Each problem is its own separate entity. This may be the first pro-women movie in which the opposite sex doesn't take a beating. No, it isn't necessary to degrade the other gender to make yours look better. Professional women surfers show their stuff but they don't slap you in the face with it. They are good not because they are female, they are good because they trained hard and worked to be where they are. Lesson learned.

You get to witness some extraordinary surfing and the camera work puts you right on the waves. Hawaii is one of the most beautiful places in the world and the outrageous waves are downright frightening and would be any surfer's wet dream. With a properly chosen cast, a beautiful backdrop and a believable but simple story, **BLUE CRUSH** is a nice way to wrap up a hot summer.

- Reviewed by Hugh Gallagher

FULL FRONTAL

(Starring Julia Roberts, Catherine Keener, Mary McCormack, Blair Underwood. Directed by Steven Soderbergh)

Whenever Julia Roberts takes the time to polish up her newly acquired *Most Overrated Actress* award (see page 11), she can display this over-hyped home video right along side of it with unfettered pride, as surely **FULL FRONTAL** will someday win the title of *Biggest Piece of Crap Ever to be Pawned Off on the Movie-Going Public*.

Attempting to actually solve the story of **FULL FRONTAL** is a sticky situation, as there is no way to really figure it out. The premise of the story inside a story inside a story has this boring ensemble cast tied together by an invitation to the 40th birthday party of moviemaker Gus (David Duchovny)... sort of.

It begins with bogus credits for Gus' movie **RENDEVOUS** and introduces us to reporter Catherine (Julia Roberts), who is interviewing rising black star Nicholas (Blair Underwood) for some Hollywood magazine. Their low-key flirting is sandwiched in between scenes of themselves playing actors Francesca and Calvin who are playing Catherine and Nicholas... wait, there is more.

Other characters thrown into the mix are married couple Carl (David Hyde

Pierce) - a self-proclaimed loser whose life is falling apart bit by bit - and his wife Lee (Catherine Keener) who, also frustrated with her dissolving marriage, takes out her anxieties at her job as a Human Resources VP making the people she is about to fire answer demeaning questions and do ridiculous acts before she drops the ax. Lee is also carrying on an affair with actor Calvin while she attempts to come to grips with her sister Linda (Mary McCormack), a masseuse who has resorted to the Internet to find the man of her dreams. Her unseen beau is Ed (Enrico Colantoni), a playwright who is currently showcasing his off-off-Broadway epic "The Sound and the Fuehrer" with an over-the-top actor playing Hitler (Nicky Katt).

Now all of this could feasibly sound like the ingredients for some interesting situations and character byplay. In actuality, though, the results could not be more brain-blindingly boring. As presented here, no movie audience could possibly care less about any of the characters involved. Should you find yourself in the unhappy situation of having this water-torture-like video unspooling in front of you, then you'd be far better off attempting to pass the time by picking out the few sight gages in the background - like the neighbor who takes out his trash dressed as Dracula, the man crawling down the hall of a hotel in his underwear or the dancing Nazis behind the radical actor playing Hitler. But these completely stupid segments lose any effect they may have being buried under the self-loathing drivel that spews from these actors' mouths. The effect is so boring that the disconnection to the audience results in a void too vast for even Evel Knievel's jumping consideration.

Fresh off **OCEAN'S ELEVEN** and **TRAFFIC**, director Soderbergh claims **FULL FRONTAL** is an unauthorized sequel to his 1989 sleeper hit **SEX, LIES AND VIDEOTAPE**... although no one will see any connection beyond the use of videotape and the apparent lie of his claim. The entire movie is more of an inside Hollywood joke on the movie industry. What Soderbergh seems to forget, however, is that even inside jokes require a punchline and nothing here is remotely funny.

Aspiring moviemakers might be drawn to **FULL FRONTAL** because of the PR announcing that the majority of it was shot on a Cannon XL1 digital video camera - a DV (digital video) camera that the average Joe can afford. The movie was also edited on a Macintosh G4 computer, an angle Mac is using to help push their computers and software. But don't go in waiting to be astonished by the low cost medium as all the DV train rambles through footage that is mostly either out-of-focus or over-exposed and makes frequent stops at points that are grainy with washed out colors. For all the promotional blather pushing the use of DV, it's bumbled handling



Michelle Rodriguez, Kate Bosworth and Sanoe Lake in **BLUE CRUSH**.

IN THE THEATER

Movie Reviews



Blair Underwood and horrendous looking Julia Roberts in **FULL FRONTAL**.

here is most conspicuous when butted against the scenes that are shot on traditional film – those moments are all beautiful and crystal clear. (Note: the filmed footage represents the “reel” movie **RENDEVOUS** while the grainy DV footage is supposed to be “real” life... we think).

The voices behind **FULL FRONTAL** boast bout their opus being shot in only 18 days on a mere \$2 million-dollar budget. One can only ask, where did they spend the money? Roberts dons a wig that looks like it was styled at the local Doggy Cuts, and her appearance doesn't improve any when she takes it off. Blair Underwood looks like a male model that got lost at an Ugly Convention, as everyone else in the cast is about unattractive and unappealing as they get. Heck, the actors even cut costs by doing their own makeup! Oh, the miseries they must have suffered. And why would they want to share those miseries with the audience?

As Soderbergh pats himself on the back for his slumming efforts, anyone with a case of beer and the family camcorder could come up with a movie to rival **FULL FRONTAL** with little to no effort. Although it may not have cameos by Brad Pitt and David Duchovny (although billed as a main player his total screen time is probably less than five minutes) they might at least come up with a story that is worth watching with better picture quality. Oh, wait, out-of-focus and grainy means art... mustn't forget that. You never knew that out-of-focus footage your Dad shot was art! Why, soddy old Uncle Al's Super-8 summer vacations must have been genius!

Although the title **FULL FRONTAL** sounds as though it would be more at home at the start of a porno movie, there's little to no sex involved. In one scene Lee and Calvin have sex, but it is shot through a piece of distorted glass so all you get is misshaped forms for five minutes while some monologue drones on. We do have the porno reference as Carl starts the running joke of having people figure out their potential porn actor name, by using the name of their first pet

and the street they lived on. This one note joke runs on incessantly until the end... multi-million dollar actors slumming it – nothing is more unpleasant. And George Costanza's “Buck Naked” is still funnier.

This movie will only appeal that portion of the pretentious art-house crowd who like to pretend that they “get it.” Unfortunately, even if you “get it,” there is nothing in **FULL FRONTAL** to “get.” You'll be checking your watch more than the screen wondering if they should have changed the title to **THE DAY THAT TIME STOOD STILL**. If I wasn't on my reviewing assignment for *Sirens*, I would have bailed on this self-indulgent tripe before the mid-way point. Even after exiting the show I was looking for a complaint window to see if I could get the last 101 minutes of my life back.

– Reviewed by Hugh Gallagher

SIMONE (Directed by Andrew Niccol. Starring Al Pacino, Rachel Roberts (Uncredited), Catherine Keener, Evan Rachel Wood, Winona Ryder. 117 minutes. New Line Cinema)



Director Viktor Taransky's (Pacino) career comeback trail hits a major snag when his spoiled-rotten star actress Nicola (Winona Ryder) stalks off his latest picture because her trailer is too small. Legally forbidden to use any of the footage she has already filmed, Viktor is in a bind. It doesn't help that the studio is run by his ex-wife, Elaine (Catherine Keener). End result: Viktor is fired and his career is going down in flames.

Left to ponder his misery, Viktor runs into a one-eyed computer genius (Elias Koteas) who claims to have created the software that will produce the perfect virtual actress. When Hank later dies, he leaves his software to Viktor.

With his back to the wall, Viktor attempts to save his movie by doing one huge PhotoShop experiment: he's going to insert his pixilated cutie, Simone (“SIM-ulation One,” get it?) into all of the scenes that originally included Nicola. Presto, Simone and his movie are both major successes.

But solving his movie problem has created a bigger dilemma. Now every reporter, critic and television host wants to meet and greet Simone. Viktor creates an aura of secretiveness around Simone, creating a super-Garbo for the 21st Century, claiming that his new star actress wants to be alone and steadfastly shuns the press. Of course, this only creates a worldwide audience that's craving Simone even more. Viktor goes all Wizard of Oz like, manipulating Simone's phony visage by computer and sending out computerized “live” interviews with her to magazines and TV shows. As Simone's male protector, he takes on the public persona of Simone's companion which succeeds in turning this rumples Shemp into a sex symbol by extension. Now even his ex-wife is starting to find Viktor the Fraud to be attractive. Can a happy ending be just around the corner?

Through it all, only Viktor's insightful daughter (Evan Rachel Wood) seems to get the drift that something is just not right with daddy.

In the end, Viktor must do something about Simone. If the world discovers his fraud, he's finished – both professionally and socially. If he continues to perpetuate Simone the superstar, he'll soon be completely over-

shadowed and morally bankrupt. And just how long can this go on?

Image vs. reality has long been a staple Hollywood plotline. Though **SIMONE** dusts the theme off and injects it with enough megabytes of style to make it appear to be something new and fresh, it really isn't.

You might remember director Niccol from his sci-fi hit **GATTACA** or from his other skewed reality film **THE TRUMAN SHOW**. It would appear that Niccol has a fixation on sorts of the image vs. reality theme. (Assuming, that is, that we think of science fiction as an alternate reality.) What Niccol doesn't have a handle on, however, is the tone of **SIMONE**. At times the film seems to want to be a biting satire on Hollywood's and society's unhealthy fixation of image over substance. At other points, it seems as if the bite wasn't strong enough and he lapses into silly slapstick or lackadaisical farce. In between, we're bored to tears by droning speeches that tell us what Niccol wants to say instead of him showing us what he wants to say. This



is the movies, you know. Moving pictures!

There is a story with some substance here, but you have to work way too hard to find it.

Pacino, as always, is at his best. It's fun to watch him running around in total comic mode when we've grown so accustomed to his grisly tough guy roles. It's nice to be reminded of just how well-rounded his talents are. Only a Pacino character could be so computer illiterate one moment and create and maintain Simone the next. Or didn't anybody else notice that?

Catherine Keener gets a rare chance to shine in a featured role. She deserves to

be seen in a watchable film after being part of the flaccid flotsam in **FULL FRONTAL** and **DEATH TO SMOOCHY**. Though **SIMONE** is not likely to be the best film she's ever appeared in (as compared to **BEING JOHN MALKOVICH**), Keener's best years and best performances are still ahead of her.

Evan Rachel Ward (from ABC's *Once and Again*) adds a layer or two of reality to the stereotypical kid-who-knows-more-than-the-adults role – a staple that goes back at least as far as the lamest *Godzilla* movie ever made.

The real story here is the creation and maintenance of Simone – the character. New Line Cinema went way out of its way to continue the mystery or at least the aura of mystery surrounding Simone by not crediting an actress to the role. (Simone plays herself according to the onscreen credits.) There's even a pretty cool website – www.s1m0ne.com – that allows Simone the creation, or the actress, to live on by creating a fictitious biography and career for her. In the end, Canadian model Rachel Roberts was finally officially named as the "inspiration" for Simone. What you wind up seeing on screen is a little CGI and a lot of Rachel Roberts. This is one movie where the special effect is worth the price of admission.

SIMONE is interesting and intermittently amusing. It's a toss-up to say if it's worth the price of admission but we're all sure as heck waiting to see what the eventually DVD presentation will look like. If they continue the Simone is real joke, it should be a keeper.

- Reviewed by Casey Yip

SWIMFAN (Directed by John Polson. Starring Jesse Bradford, Erika Christensen, Shiri Appleby.)

Beautiful girls, a weird title, and Erika Christensen's come-hither look on the movie poster...**SWIMFAN** will be a tough movie for most to pass by. But you may wish to read this review before diving in.

Ben Cronin (Jesse Bradford) seems to have it all. A beautiful and supportive girlfriend (Amy, played by Shiri Appleby fresh from *Roswell* and *Xena*), he is the number one athlete on his swim team at his high school, and he learns that he has an excellent chance of landing a scholarship at an up n' coming swim meet that college scouts will be attending. Life couldn't get any better... until Madison comes into the picture.

Madison Bell (Christensen) is the new kid at school, but kid wouldn't be the proper term for this wavy haired vixen. Ben comes to her rescue by getting her jammed locker open and the two magically keep bumping into each other afterwards. Ben obviously has an attraction to the blonde beauty and after he returns a notebook that Madison accidentally left in his car, the two go out for dinner. Ben explains to Madison how life didn't use to be so great. He was messed up on drugs and was arrested for stealing and it was his girlfriend Amy and his love for swimming that turned his life around. He tells Madison he cannot be with her because it just wouldn't be right. Madison also admits to having a boyfriend waiting for her back in New York, but hopefully the two of them can just remain friends. Later, when Madison is alone with Ben at the pool, the two get caught up in the heat of the moment and make love, to which Madison claims will be their little secret.

When Ben awakes the next day, he knows he has done wrong. He starts off by lying to Amy about where he was the night before and soon finds that Madison isn't going to let their little one-night stand pass. She e-mails him (hence the name of the movie, her e-mail address is Swimfan85), pages him and continually shows up unexpectedly. As Ben attempts to thwart her continuous advances, they only become worse. After continuous rejection she begins to mess with his life and slowly tear him apart piece by piece. He loses his job at the hospital when one of the patients gets the wrong pills; he gets kicked off the swim team when steroids are detected in his system; and people around him start to turn up dead. This girl is a fanatic but everyone around him believes that Ben is doing the damage, waving his past



record as a drug addict and thief in front of his face. A final confrontation between the one-time lovers is inevitable.

SWIMFAN has an excellent cast. They were well picked for their roles and deliver believable performances with what they have to work with. Shiri Appleby makes the perfect girl next door, whereas Christensen has the ability to turn the most innocent angelic smile into a look that can only be compared to a psycho bitch from hell. It is easy to see why Ben falls into her clutches and it is equally easy to see why he is scared as hell once he has.

What is annoying about **SWIMFAN** is the insane editing any time a confrontation between two people occurs. When Ben and Madison get together for some abusive banter, we are suddenly forced to watch annoying jump cuts that make no sense whatsoever. We have a good cast ready to intensify the drama, only to lose any potential climax by these weird and maddening jump cuts. This is a teen movie so one assumes that this is hip, but all it does is distract you from what is being said and it loses the emotion of the scene. Way to screw up a movie!

Another problem with the movie is by the time Madison is in full kill mode it suddenly turns into **FRIDAY THE 13TH**. Although Erika Christensen is more fun to watch than Jason, you can't help falling into disbelief whenever she is able to walk around and do what she wants without raising anyone's suspicion. And just when you think it is over... one should check the police handbook on proper cuffing techniques – aren't all suspects cuffed with their hands behind their back? Obviously not, as Madison sits with her hands in her lap in the back of the cop car next to the bumbling policeman who has just spilt his coffee... don't want to giveaway crucial information, but everyone will see what is coming a mile away.

The movie never really clarifies what really happened to Madison's boyfriend from New York, who happened to be a baseball star at his school. Although we eventually meet him, there are never any real facts to spell out what

happened to him and why. It is easy for people to draw up different conclusions based on what is presented – which makes it difficult to understand why Madison is the way she is. Is she obsessed with successful high school athletes? Her fixation is never really explained and her actions are never justified.

SWIMFAN is merely a watered down version of **FATAL ATTRACTION** without the explicit sex scenes. Which is too bad. Maybe the writing team shouldn't have stayed in the kiddie pool with the PG-13 swimmers and, instead, could have tried diving head first into the deep end with the R-rated adults. With a tighter script, a little more sex and someone that knew how to edit, **SWIMFAN** could have been a swimming a victory lap instead of winding up just doing the dead man's float.

- Reviewed by Hugh Gallagher

THE GOOD GIRL

(Starring Jennifer Aniston, Jake Gyllenhaal, John C. Reilly, Tim Blake Nelson. Directed by Miguel Arteta)

It is exceedingly refreshing to go into a movie that Hollywood has not corrupted. Unlike the majority of films out there that seem to use some generic script where the only thing that changes are the names of the characters, **THE GOOD GIRL** takes a slice of life and puts it up one display for the audience to dissect in their own way. Mixed emotions ran throughout the audience at the screening of this film, and although the end verdicts varied it was easy to say that this movie had made some kind of impression on everyone that had seen it.

Jennifer Aniston plays Justine Last, a woman who lives a mundane existence working in a small-town store in Texas called the Retail Rodeo. She spends her days watching the clock and feeling as though she has let her

"A Comedy of Winning Delicacy and Heart"
"A Fantastic Performance from Jennifer Aniston with Range and Depth"
"By Comic and Touching"
(A) (A) (A)



the good girl
It's not just about the girl. It's about the man.



Jesse Bradford and Erika Christensen in **SWIMFAN**.

life pass her by. When her eight hours are up she leaves her working prison to go home to her husband Phil (John C. Reilly), a house painter who likes to spend his free time watching TV and smoking pot with his painting partner and best friend Bubba (Tim Blake Nelson).. Justine would like to have children but the couple cannot conceive and Justine blames Phil's continuous pot smoking as the culprit.

Whether from curiosity or plain boredom, Justine takes a special interest in a new employee at the store named Holden. This 22-year-old boy likes to keep to himself reading his favorite book *The Catcher in the Rye*, and he is completely different from everything else in Justine's mundane life. She spends her lunchtime with him and slowly draws him out of his shell. She finds that Holden was kicked out of college for drinking problems and is now living at home with his parents attempting to straighten his life out. His goal is to one day become a great novelist like his hero JD Salinger. He even stole his name from Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* book; Holden's real name is Tom, to which he refers to as his "slave name."

As Holden becomes more comfortable with Justine he makes her feel that maybe there is something beyond their unexciting lives at the store. When he attempts to take their relationship to the next level, Justine first resists, but then gives in to his desires. Once the two consummate their relationship at a local hotel, they find themselves sneaking sex throughout the day at their job, taking advantage of hiding places in the storage room at the Retail Rodeo.

Justine struggles with her guilt of cheating on her husband while at the same time enjoys her passion with Holden, even though he doesn't always seem to be playing with a full deck. Things come to an abrupt halt one night when they exit a hotel room and Justine sees Bubba's truck parked outside the hotel. She fears that Bubba, or worse yet, Phil knows about her affair and she tries to cool things down with Holden. Bubba approaches Justine about the situation and wants



Jennifer Aniston is *THE GOOD GIRL*.

to meet with her privately to discuss the matter. Bubba tells Justine that he has always admired Phil and that he has always tried to live up to his image. He feels his life has been in a rut since Phil married Justine as Bubba thinks that Justine is the image of perfection and something Bubba could never obtain. After Bubba saw that Justine was cheating on Phil he plans to cease this as his golden moment, and opportunity to lift a great weight off of his shoulders. He tells Justine if she has sex with him one time that he will never tell Phil about the affair. Amazingly Justine agrees.

No sooner than Justine feels she has solved one problem, she discovers Holden has witnessed her illicit acts with Bubba, and he has once again gone off the deep end. He wants Justine badly and begins to drink again to drown his desires. Justine knows she must eliminate Holden to regain the life she once so desperately wanted to leave.

Jennifer Aniston does an amazing job in becoming Justine Last. She is a woman who has no idea what she wants, yet knows she doesn't want what she has. Once her life gets out of control she finds herself struggling not to lose what once was trying to escape from. Aniston carries her slight Texan accent with skill and she is able

to keep her charismatic charm in control and come across as simply that cute girl next door working simply off her natural beauty.

What is inspiring about this film is the sprinkling of characters intermixed within the main story itself. Such as Justine's always upbeat co-worker Gwen (Deborah Rush) who is happy with her job, eats right and has an optimistic view on life. She suddenly is killed after eating some blackberries she bought from a man on the side of the road. Corry (Mike White), the store security guard who lives in a "holier than thou" world with his bible study group, but still exists the same ordinary life with everyone else. Cheryl (Zooey Deschanel) the young cashier that is kicked off the store PA for her wise cracks and moved into cosmetics where she paints up old women as French whores in attempts to add a little spice to her nearly lifeless existence. No one fares well in this film.

The most disturbing scene in this movie is when Justine succumbs to Bubba's wishes to have sex with her in exchange for him not revealing her affair with Holden to Phil. Bubba screams at his large German Shepard to get in its corner as he has his way with the almost lifeless Justine as she stares off into space trying to figure out how her life can possibly get

worse. Amazingly, it can, and does. Holden's own theories about hitting rock bottom seem to ring true throughout this story in which if you can actually say you've hit rock bottom, you haven't hit it yet.

Although this review may read like a bad soap opera it is very difficult to convey the feelings this movie will invoke within each viewer. It is impossible for anyone not examine one's own life and try and realize which paths chosen were right or wrong. There were several points in the film where it would have been easy for the director to have taken the easy Hollywood way out, but he chose to follow a rather slow-moving path in which each spectator must contemplate which direction should Justine turn? Which direction would I turn? The best scene comes at the end of the film in which Justine drives her car up to a crossroad and stops. She knows if she turns left that one thing will happen, if she turns right a completely different outcome will take place. She closes her eyes and tries to look into the future to find the answer of which direction she should turn, but unfortunately none of us have a crystal ball. Each choice we make is merely a toss of the dice, the luck of the draw. There is logic and illogic, but some times there is just a fine line distinguishing the two.

I would like to toss *THE GOOD GIRL* in as a surprise contender for some Academy Award nominations as the acting across the board as well as the direction is nothing short of excellent. It is a journey for the mind in which each onlooker is taken along for the ride... whether they want to go or not.

- Reviewed by Hugh Gallagher

FIREFLY: JEWEL cont...

People are already comparing it to other shows and it hasn't even been aired yet. They'll be surprised to see how unique it really is.

SoC: What other projects (TV, film or theatre) have you worked on recently?

JS: Before *Firefly*, I did a series for NBC called *Just Deal*. It was a teen-angst type of show, but I had so much fun filming it. The vibe there was really great. Everyone got along so well.

SoC: What's your favorite TV show of all time?

JS: All time? I don't know about all time, but one of my most favorite TV shows is *Friends*. The way they all interact with each other is genius. And I love, love, love *The Crocodile Hunter*.

SoC: What about a favorite movie or book?

JS: My favorite movie right now is *THE AN-*

NIVERSARY PARTY and my favorite book is *"Fall On Your Knees"* by a Canadian named Anne-Marie MacDonald. I also love anything by J.D. Salinger. *"The Little Prince"* by Antoine de Saint-Exupery. And *"Memoirs of a Geisha"* is amazing. I have always dreamed of turning one of my favorite novels into a screenplay. I would love to play Franny in *"Franny and Zooey."*

SoC: What five pieces of music could you not live without?

JS: Lauryn Hill's *Unplugged*, Sarah Vaughan's *Embraceable You*, Her Best by Etta James; D'Angelo's *Voodoo* and *The Buena Vista Social Club* soundtrack

SoC: Describe your dream project in either theater, film or TV.

JS: Besides a film version of *"Franny and Zooey,"* I would love to do some Broadway at some point in my life...a good musical type thing. Like *Rent* or *Chicago*.

SoC: What's the best thing about being in L.A.?

JS: The best thing is that every day is sunny and hot. And the shopping is fantastic.

SoC: What about the worst?

JS: Oh, the worst is the traffic. At any time of the day, if you find yourself in the wrong area, it seems like everyone in L.A. is in their car, trying to get somewhere.

SoC: What one fact about you would most amaze viewers of *Firefly*?

JS: I can perform the entire *Les Miserables* musical, every song, every character's part in each song, very accurately. Also, when I sing Disney songs, I sound scarily close to the voices of the female Disney characters...Ariel, Jasmine, Belle, and Pocahontas. Apparently, I'm a natural mimic. I pick up voices, accents and mannerisms easily.

SOC: When you're not knee-deep in acting,

what do you like to do for R&R?

JS: I love watching movies. I love staying in bed in the mornings and reading. I love shopping...clothes shopping mainly. I love going to pet stores. I love swimming and sun-tanning. I love writing, and when I'm away from home, writing letters. I love doing all of these things with my fiancé. I love cooking and eating. I love cuddling with my cat. I love daydreaming.

The JEWEL STAITE SoC SHEET

Born: June 2, 1982

Place: White Rock, British Columbia

Sign: Gemini-Scorpio rising

Likes: Music, books, movies, confrontation, conversation, questions, gossip, loyalty, romance, Spanish, wine, children, real tans, and animals.

Dislikes: Dentists, weak women, ignorance, cartoons, the news, Thai food, violent movies, spiders, reptiles, apologizing, and corn.

CONTEST RESULTS continued...

OTHER UNUSUAL VOTING CATEGORIES:

Just to make things more interesting, we isolated some of the votes into specific categories and rated your favorites by giving a point for each Underrated Vote and subtracting one for each Overrated Vote. Some of the results may surprise you!



Michelle Yeoh

DELUXE ASIAN IMPORTS

(We're casting a wide net, folks – this includes stars from Asia and stars born in Asia)

Anita Mui	37.4%
Shu Qi	10.2%
Cherrie Ying	4.00%
Zhang Ziyi	3.5%
Michelle Yeoh	3.4%
Ming Na	3.4%
Sandra Ng	3.35%
Samyuktha Vernu	3.35%
Chingmy Yau	3.3%
Gracy Singh	3.275%
Gong Li	3.275%
Maggie Cheung	3.25%
Carol "Dodo" Cheng	3.25%
Juhi Chawla	3.175%
Gigi Leung	3.00%
Raveena Tandon	2.25%
Sammi Cheng	2.00%
Cecilia Cheung	2.00%
Kenix Kwok	1.175%
Vicky Zhao-Wei	0.75%
Twinkle Khanna	0.50%
Almen Wong	0.20%



SoC in the City

If *Sirens of Cinema* readers had their way, the hierarchy on HBO's hit sexy sistah series *Sex In The City* would be rearranged quite a based on voter rankings:

KIRSTEN DAVIS	64%
CYNTHIA NIXON	20%
SARAH JESSICA PARKER	10%
KIM CATTRALL	6%



Battle of the Jennifers

– Who's the Favorite Jennifer??

Jennifer Aniston	26%
Jennifer Love Hewitt	21%
Jennifer Esposito	15%
Jennifer Garner	10%
Jennifer Connolly	7%
Jennifer Warren	5.5%
Jennifer Jason Leigh	5%
Jennifer Lopez	4%
Jennifer Tilly	2.5%
Jennifer Skye	1%
Jennifer Saunders	1%
Jennifer Beals	1%



THE CURIOSITY CORNER

Not exactly actresses but they got voters attention.

Katie Couric – With 1.05% of the Underrated Votes and NO Overrated Votes, she placed 16th overall in this very unscientific survey. With her one line in *AUSTIN POWERS IN GOLDMEMBER*, Katie actually outpolled over 400 other actresses in our poll including Marilyn Monroe, Katherine Hepburn and Natalie Wood. We didn't even think Katie stayed up late enough to watch movies, let alone charm the public in one. Can't she keep her day job and still put in a Hollywood cameo here and there? We hope so.



Paula Abdul – With her frightening percentage of Underrated Votes received, considering that no one has ever considered her to be an actress, Abdul actually fared much worse, relatively speaking, than Julia Roberts. *Sirens* publisher Hugh Gallagher commented, "I didn't even know she earned a rating. Her career peaked in the early '90s and she's never seen that caliber of success since. The fact that she is a God-awful judge on *American Idol* simply proves that she is doing whatever she can to stay out of the unemployment line." Editor Kevin Collins wasn't much kinder, "I guess a combination of being past her expiration date and being so shrill and pandering on *American Idol* just touched a nerve in the American public." Interestingly, while she received no underrated votes, nearly all of Paula's negative nods arrived via e-mail within hours of each episode of *American Idol* airing on Fox. It was almost as if *American* couldn't get to their PCs fast enough to voice their Abdul-inspired angst. Despite rumors of a new cd, expect her to slide back into oblivion unless she's back on board with *American Idol 2*.

SWEET MUSIC AND SOUR NOTES

According to *Sirens* voters, who's your favorite Singer turned Actress?

Britney Spears – 38% - Next poll we'll require proof of age to vote. But she won in a walk.

Jennifer Lopez – 25% - J.Lo can take heart that she fared better against her Grammy peers than against her Oscar contenders

Björk – 20% - It's not all swans and a cool accent, she's got acting chops too!



Mandy Moore – 8% - No one had anything bad to say about her. She's got a future.

Whitney Houston 5% - Lukewarm reception. Didn't anyone remember *MY BODYGUARD*? Oh, maybe they did.

Mariah Carey – 3% - A few pity votes kept her ahead of Babs. There's no Oscar glitter in this future.

Barbra Streisand - 0% - Most of the voters remarks were unprintable. The backlash was as much artistic as political which surprised us because we assumed her politics had overshadowed her entertainment value by now.

FASTLANE cont...

music icons like **John Doe** and **Isaac Hayes**, an armory full of weapons (gleaming Desert Eagles, H&K SMGs), a virtual *Hemmings Motor News* brought to life in the form of Boxsters, classic El Caminos, and the like, and a music video-style of editing and cinematography, there's much to like about this show. It's tough to say, however, if its high-concept approach to revving up the cop show formula will catch on (remember *Dog and Cat*, with Kim Basinger, or *Mann & Machine* with Yancy Butler? Don't feel bad; almost no one else saw them, either). It will have to draw a fairly big audi-

SIREN'S SOUND-OFF cont...

and I hope that you will do an interview with her very soon because she understands the politics of China and she is a strong supporter and patriot of human rights and of her country. Without a doubt she is Hong Kong's most precious export.

Pansy Chen
San Francisco CA

Dear Sirens Soundoff -

Thank you for the photo of Vickie Zhao. Months of searching the Internet and other magazines have failed to show that picture. Now I understand what the fuss was about. She should be ashamed of herself but she should be forgiven whenever she makes an honest and heartfelt apology.

Ciao,
Robert Cannell
Flagstaff, AZ

Dear Hugh Gallagher:

I bought your *Sirens of Cinema* magazine this morning. Why must you print that horrible photo of Zhao Wei wearing the flag of EVIL JAPAN in your magazine? She is traitor to her country and not to be publicized for acting like the hand of the devil. Her career is not longer a topic for enjoyment to many of us Chinese at home or here in America. To know and understand what the Japanese have done to my people and to our country is not a subject for a fashion exhibit. And that she wore this in New York which has only seen the terror of EVIL now on the soil of my new precious country is a double insult to all Chinese, Americans and people who love GOOD all over the world. Do you not condemn her also?

Hilda Tsoi Yuen
San Francisco, CA

[The opinions of Pansy, Robert and Hilda represent a good cross section of the letters we received on this topic (Hong Kong News, Sirens of Cinema #3). We would love to be able to interview Zhao Wei and give her an forum to explain this very touchy situation. On the face of it, we can certainly see why many Chinese people were offended by what they saw when she wore that outfit depicting a WWII Japanese battle flag. Yes, that Japan was evil. Today's Japan is not. Without firsthand knowledge of what Zhao Wei knew at the time, we are willing to withhold judgment for now. From all other accounts Zhao Wei appears to be a very nice and loving person so it's highly possible - if not probable - that this episode, as terrible as it was, may have simply been an isolated moment of innocent ignorance. We'll do our best to find out for you. If anyone was offended by the photo we printed of the incident, we apologize for any hurt feelings but we stand by our commitment to report and show the facts as we see them. - KC]

Very kind of you to announce that Cecilia

ence since the location shooting and stuntwork make it an expensive shoot. There has already been some good critical reaction to the show. *Entertainment Weekly* picked Bill Bellamy and Peter Facinelli as their "It" Speed Demons, and said the show has "style and speed to spare." Fox is clearly behind it, too, running the spots for the series again and again, and arranging unusual events (like a special paintball shoot-out promotion) to get viewers to tune in.

At this point, though, to borrow a line from Billie Chambers, "it's a theory with a budget," albeit one with some killer figures.

Cheung had been in such a bad accident. The local market here that carries HK movies and CDs had no new materials from Cecilia and we had no idea that something so terrible had happened. Why wasn't something like this covered in other magazines or newspapers? Cecilia and other actresses and singers from Hong Kong and Asia have very large fan followings here in the United States and we would like to know what is going on. Can you publish more often or keep updates on our website so that we can be informed? Thank God for Sirens of Cinema's Hong Kong News reports.

Bobbie Mullen
Minneapolis MN

[Thank you for your kind words. Cecilia's back in the movie business and apparently fully recovered, we're happy to say. She is currently appearing in MIGHTY BABY along with Cherrie Ying whom we profile in this issue. - SoC]

Sirens Sound-Off

Do you know if Corinne Bohrer has retired? She hasn't been on TV or in a film since INCONCEIVABLE. She was on a commercial for Pier One but she looked pregnant. Do you know if she was/is? Did she have a baby? She's the funniest pretty woman in the movies.

Deanna Treblehorn
Patterson NJ

[You can find out more about Corinne on page 16 of this issue! - HG]

Soundoff:

While browsing through your intense coverage of Kirsten Dunst I came upon the colourful, revitalising and entertaining review of INTERVIEW WITH THE VAMPIRE by your Albert O'Dalby. With a smart quip and a wit like a surgeon's scalpel, Mr. O'Dalby succeeded beyond the dreams of critics around the world in putting this abomination of film in its rightful place. Trash, no matter how you try to pretty it up, is still trash. Tom Cruise and Brad Pitt do not succeed in saving this wretched piece of storytelling from the refuse bin. Rather they help to anchor it deeply in the dumps. Please express my thanks to Mr. O'Dalby. I hope he continues to call each and every spade a spade during his employ with your magazine.

Ingrid Pastor
London, England

[Mr. O'Dalby refuses to talk to me after I forced him to review INTERVIEW WITH A VAMPIRE... but I'm sure he'll read your appreciative comments - HG]

Soundoff:

What ever happened to Meg Tilly? Do you guys know?

Bo Boeckel
Newport RI

MARÍA FÉLIX cont...

spirit. Looking back, Félix commented, "In cinema as well as in life, it's much more important to seduce than to please...thus began my legend before you could even move your finger. The public's imagination created my entire image for me."

MARE NOSTRUM

Félix traveled to Madrid to perform in her first European film in 1948. Her co-star was the internationally renowned **Fernando Rey**. In one of her typically smoky roles, she breathed life into a shady Mata Hari-like character in a plot thick with intrigue and espionage.

LA CORONA NEGRA (aka "The Black Crown")

With *La Doña* in mind, **Jean Cocteau**

wrote the script for this story filmed in Morocco in 1951. According to Félix, a sheik invited them to eat human meat and they were not in a position to refuse, "It was a delicious dish and nobody got sick." How this quote goes down depends upon if you take it with Félix's legendary grain of salt or if you think she was accurately quoting the menu.

FRENCH CANCAN

The leading French film star **Jean Gabin** is a suave and debonair presence in **FRENCH CANCAN**. The legendary **Edith Piaf** also appears. Maria sizzles as the beautiful Moulin Rouge dancer **Abbesse** who drives men crazy with her undulating footwork that nearly a half-century later, still puts **Baz Luhrmann's** overproduced **MOULIN ROUGE** to shame.

[Meg Tilly has not made a movie since the mid-90s. She has lived a low-key life and even spent a few years in the wilderness of Canada with her family (she has been married three times and has three children), and it has been reported that she didn't even own a TV. She published a book in 1995 entitled "Singing Songs," the story of a young girl's journey to adulthood within an abusive family. Meg has plans to bring the book to the big screen but intends on staying behind the camera... there is no word if she will rejoin the acting ranks with her successful older sister Jennifer. An in-depth look at Meg may be in order for a future issue of Sirens; she currently lives in Southern California with husband movie producer John Calley. - HG]

Dear Mr. Gallagher:

I love your idea of choosing the most under-rated actress. It's great that you are allowing your readers to sound off (so to speak) and give your magazine an idea of whom we want to hear about.

Can you please skew more of your attention to actresses in films instead of minor TV role players. Not that there's anything wrong with TV or even cable TV but we are looking for *Sirens of Cinema* to deliver sirens of cinema. Yancy Butler's are cool but some of the other cable actresses just seem to be space fillers for you. But I really want to find out more about Corinne Bohrer. She's been in so many different roles from comedy to drama, nerds to hookers, sugary sweet to dead naked sexy. Please let her win!

Now that you have delivered a spectacular history of Shu Qi and you continue to cover Anita Mui, can you someday bring us people like Sammi Cheng or Miriam Yeung? How about stories from Europe with people like Brigitte Lahaie or Audrey Tautou?

Will you be able to publish more often anytime soon?

Best wishes,
Patricia Leon
Delpark Manor, DE

[We have been a bit TV biased in the first three issues, but you need to take into consideration that all of these women have also been in films as well (which we covered), they just happened to be better known for their TV careers. As far as publishing more often... the idea of doing the same amount of research we put in on a quarterly issue every month would be against the advice of my doctor, psychiatrist and spiritual guru and from Kevin Collins, who threatens my life whenever I mention it. Until our staff grows or I can handle ten jobs at one time instead of five, we will be stuck with the quarterly schedule. The best we can hope for at this time is bi-monthly. - HG]

Gentlemen,

What a unique pleasure to find a magazine about women of television and movies that does not condescend to teenage boys

and girls and treats both its subject matter and its audience in a mature and intelligent manner! I spend much of my time in Singapore and Toronto so I can say with confidence that *Sirens of Cinema* is not only the only entertainment magazine in America that is perfect for men and women of all ages, it is also the best in Asia and Canada.

The in-depth studies of Shu Qi and Yancy Butler in *Sirens of Cinema* issue 3 are examples of research and expressive writing that is not commonly seen in entertainment magazines at the present time. I would also like to see research material like the Kirsten Dunst checklist to become regular items in each issue. Perhaps this is already planned but I can imagine that many readers were enthralled with the detail of your research.

If I was to suggest any constructive criticism to you, I would ask for more personal interviews and definitely more photographs. Interviews that are self-promoting or pandering (ie. the Virginia Hey piece that turned into a self-adulating promotion instead of a give and take conversation) generally are not interesting. Perhaps you will approach future interviews (Christina Ricci or Asia Argento or Karen Mok) with the stability and creativity that you have shown in the vast majority of your articles, essays and reviews.

To my dismay, I came across *Sirens of Cinema* too late to enter into your very interesting Shill contest. Despite your magazine's detailed coverage of Anita Mui over your past two issues, I think her career and activities are still incredibly underreported and I would have voted for her as such (ie. Underrated). There are so many actresses who are overrated these days that to pick one from a field as wide as Camryn Manheim, Megan Mullally, Sammi Cheng or Susan Sarandon would be arbitrary or drawing straws. But if any contest would have begged for Julia Roberts name to be written in, the most overrated actress contest would be the one.

Searching the *Sirens of Cinema* rather scant website this weekend, I did not find the answers to your crossword puzzle which you promised to have posted in July. Were they ever put on the site or am I just too late to find them?

From Singapore to California to Toronto, the LeBrand family has become dedicated fans of *Sirens of Cinema* and we wish you all the best for a long and thriving journalistic stay on our store shelves.

Sincerely,
Paul LeBrand
Los Angeles, CA

[Thanks for your friendly comments. We'll let you judge the interviews this issue to see if they possess a more personal feel. It is too bad that you didn't enter the Shill Contest as your choices were on the money. Check out the answers to last issue's crossword on page 9. Thanks for writing. - HG]



KILL CRUISE

Elizabeth Hurley

In a drunken state, spur of the moment decisions are made by two British women, Elizabeth Hurley and Patsy Kensit, "Fall from Grace", and a German sailor to go on a voyage to the West Indies. But both women realize that this cruise is about to turn dead wrong!



ELVIRA MISTRESS OF THE DARK

Wisecracking vamp Elvira wants to put on a show in Las Vegas but she's short \$50,000. So when she learns that her wealthy Aunt Morgana has just died she rushes off to old-fashioned, conservative Falwell, Massachusetts for a reading of the will. In typical Elvira fashion, she can't help but stir things up when she makes her appearance



MADAM

Based on a true story of Heidi Fleiss Call Girls Frustrated with TV journalism, investigative reporter Danielle Williams goes undercover to expose the truth about Los Angeles call girls. Unsatisfied with a story based on one former call girl, Danielle plunges into this mysterious dark world, getting a job at what seems like a legitimate escort agency. The seductive madam sends her to many unusual clients, each one showing her a new experience. Danielle videotapes her sexual encounters to record her research, but soon forgets her work as she falls in love with this new lifestyle. Starring: Joe Estevez, Britany McKenna, James Coburn Jr. Not Rated Running Time: 92 Minutes



ANGEL

At 15 years old Molly is the best in her class in highschool. Nobody suspects that the model pupil earns her money at night: as prostitute "Angel" on Sunset Blvd. The well-organized separation of her two lives is shattered when two of her friends are slayed by a necrophile serial killer. She's the only eye witness and becomes a target herself. The investigating Detective Andrews helps her, not only to survive, but also to query why she keeps on humiliating herself and to stop it. Running Time 94 Minutes Starring Cliff Gorman, Susan Tyrrell, Dick Shawn, Rory Calhoun, Donna Wilkes, John Diehl, Elaine Gifts, Donna McDaniel, Graem McGavin.



ANGEL 3

ANGEL SPENT YEARS MAKING MEN HAPPY... NOW IT'S TIME TO MAKE THEM PAY. Now a New York photographer, Angel returns to Los Angeles to search for her mother who abandoned her as a baby. Her mother is killed shortly after their first and only meeting, but not before she confides that Angel has a sister who is in great danger. Angel goes undercover on the streets and discovers that the sister she never knew is working for a powerful Madame who is secretly operating a white slavery ring. When Angel learns that her sister is about to be sold, she races to bust up the ring before it's too late!



PAMELA ANDERSON LEE

Like Venus rising from the waves, fabulous Pamela Anderson Lee has risen to become the idol of millions. This enchanting beauty has captivated audiences around the world with her incredible good looks and bubbly enthusiasm. This video highlights the career of the world's top sex symbol, Pamela Anderson Lee. Follow Pamela through her dazzling television career and forays onto the big screen. Her love life has been as much a subject of attention as her acting career, and her roller coaster marriage to Rock's "bad boy" Tommy Lee the subject of media fascination. Through it all, Pamela has maintained a spirit of optimism and determination that has always marked her life.



MURDER ON FLIGHT 502

Farrah Fawcett, Robert Stack This gripping thriller begins with a letter found in the first class airport lounge in New York after an international flight has taken off. The letter states that there will be several murders on the flight prior to landing in London. Farrah Fawcett and an all-star cast keep this great mystery movie moving at a tension filled pace throughout.



KATE'S ADDICTION

Laser hot Kate (Kari Wuhrer) came to Los Angeles to find an old friend (Farrah Fawcett). But what she seeks - and what she desires - is more than just friendship. And this time - anyone who gets in her way will be destroyed!



THE FAT SPY

Jayne Mansfield, Phylliss Diller

WHO SHOT PAT?

Sandra Bullock ("While You Were Sleeping", "Speed") stars in a wistful story set during the late 1950s. This nostalgic drama portrays the lives of a group of Brooklyn high-schoolers. Big trouble starts when a random gunfire wounds one of the teenagers. The rest of the group now goes in search of the scoundrel doing the shooting.



BOARDING SCHOOL DVD The girls at St. Clare's Academy feel that one aspect of their education has been neglected - sex. When the new American student, Debbie (Natassia Kinski) comes to stay she decides to take care of the problem. Together the girls decide to pose as brothel to attract boys from the boarding school across the lake. Calling themselves Club Love Unlimited, the girls soon get a lot of business..until the head mistress finds out!



Draculina #42: Featuring interviews with adult star that was presumed dead - HYAPATIA LEE! Plus interview with rock star/actress CHERIE CURRIE, BIKINI DRIVE-IN star ASHLIE RHEY, Gothic Sluts and Blue Blood creator AMELIA G, WRESTLING VIXXENS UNLEASHED, German actress CARINA PALMER and new Asian review section SEXY CHINA DOLLS plus more! At printers now and will ship August 13th! Don't miss it! \$7



DRACULINA #41: 68 jammed packed pages! Interviews with photographer Justice Howard and actresses: Marina Morgan, Allanah Rhodes, Darian Caine, Esmerelda and Ryli Morgan. Plus THE HAUNTING OF SLAGHTER STUDIOS, SHADOW OF THE DEMON, SORORITY HOUSE VAMPIRES, The Nuns, Dead-On Video, the Genitortures, TRANSVES-TITE INVASION and more! Full color, tons of photos! \$7



DRACULINA #40: Featuring Donna Spangler and the SPACE GIRLS OF BEVERLY HILLS! Interviews with KELLI MARONEY, PHINA OURCHE, JASI LANIER, KIM DAWSON, NICOLE MOORE and KEVIN COLLINS from One Shot Productions. Plus, interview with the director of FANTOM KILER - ROMAN NOWICKI. With tons of photos from the movie plus a 3-page centerfold! Also, DEATH SCAN, letters and tons of photos! \$7

DRACULINA and SQI feature actresses of B and Z grade movies. Both magazines contain interviews, articles and other material related to the B-market. Each magazine contains nudity and adult material which cannot be sold to persons under 18 years of age.



#28: Featuring Glori-Anne Gilbert! "Penthouse" model and star of such movies as VAMPIRE CALLGIRLS, NIGHT VAMPS and many more! Features interview, filmography and tons of photos! Many of which have never been seen before! \$7



SQI #26: Featuring MISTY MUNDAE, star of such videos as INFAMOUS BONDAGE MURDERS, GLADIATOR EROTICUS and many more. Overview of her career, new interview and tons of photos, many of which have never been seen before! \$7



SQI #25: Interview, filmography and many never-seen-before photos of B-movie favorite LORISSA MCCOMAS! Heavy 80# paper, full color! A must for Lorrissa McComas fans! \$7



SQI #24: Focuses in on the life and career of Michelle Bauer including many NEVER SEEN BEFORE explicit photos! Heavy 80# paper, full color! Michelle Bauer fans will not want to miss this issue! \$7

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A photograph of three young women standing close together and smiling. The woman on the left is wearing a white tank top and light blue shorts. The woman in the middle is wearing a yellow top and a leopard print skirt. The woman on the right is wearing a blue and white striped shirt. They are all looking towards the camera.



Sarah Michelle Gellar

A woman with dark hair, wearing a white, possibly wet, dress, is posing for a photograph. She is looking towards the camera with a slight smile. Her right hand is raised, touching her hair. The background is a plain, light color.A woman with dark hair, wearing a red sleeveless dress with a floral pattern, standing against a plain background.


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SIRENS OF CINEMA #3: An in-depth look at *Witchblade* star Yancy Butler! Plus the toast of Taiwan Shu Qi! Coverage of Anita Mui Fantasy Gig Tour 2002! The Kirsten Dunst movie checklist - a complete tally of all her movies with reviews! Interviews with stunt woman Chona Jason, STAR WARS women Nalini Krishan and Michonne Bourriague, Stella Stevens and *Farscape* star Virginia Hey! Plus movie news, Hong Kong movie news, theater movie reviews and much more! \$6



SIRENS OF CINEMA #2: THE WOMEN OF V.I.P. In-depth look at Pamela Anderson, Molly Culver, Natalie Raitano, Leah Lail and Angelle Brooks from the hit TV show V.I.P.! Interview with Asian star Almen Wong from the HER NAME IS CAT movies. Interview with "Playboy" model and actress Natasha Yi! Interview with producer Darlene Cypser and actress Barbara Gehring from *DRAGON AND THE HAWK*! Plus: Movie reviews, videos reviews and U.S. and Hong movie news! A great issue only \$6!



SIRENS OF CINEMA #1: Featuring an in-depth look at Shannen Doherty, Alyssa Milano, Holly Marie Combs and Rose McGowan. Plus interviews with Melissa R. Martin and Alice Frank from the new teenage sci-fi horror film *THE SOURCE*. Jacquelyn Ruffner from *THE THIRD SOCIETY*. A look at USA Network movie *WOLF GIRL* plus loads of movie and video reviews! Full color on glossy paper. Informative issue crammed with articles! Collectors edition! **GET IT WHILE YOU CAN!** \$6

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Buffy the Vampire Slayer ©2002 UPN

SIRENS OF CINEMA FAVORITE FEMALE ACTION STAR CONTEST!

Hey, Sirens fans, ready to win an exciting DVD action collection? (See description on the left) One lucky reader will walk off with this thrilling prize package simply by giving us his or her opinions.

Sirens of Cinema wants to find out who you believe is the best female action star in both movies and television. Simply cut out and complete the entry form below and tell us who you think is the queen of thrills in both mediums. Entries must be postmarked no later than November 4. Every entry that correctly matches the winner of each category will be eligible for the Sirens of Cinema action-packed DVD set. The Grand Prize winner will be determined based upon the short essay question.

So enter now...but only one entry per contestant. We'll publish the results of your opinions in the next issue of "Sirens of Cinema"!!!

ENTRY FORM

Name: _____

Address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____

E-Mail: _____

BEST TV ACTION STAR: _____

BEST MOVIE ACTION STAR: _____

GRAND PRIZE ESSAY QUESTION: In 25 words or less, explain one of your two choices:

You may also write your entry on a separate sheet of paper and mail it to:
Sirens of Cinema Action- PO BOX 587 - Glen Carbon, Illinois 62034.

You may also fax your entry to: 618 659-1129

You may also enter via the Internet by going to: www.sirensforcinema.com

Entries must all be received in the time frame stated above.